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Off that spectrum entirely : a study of female-bodied transgender-identified individuals.

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OFF THAT SPECTRUM ENTIRELY:
A STUDY OF FEMALE-BODIED TRANSGENDER-IDENTIFIED INDIVIDUALS

A Dissertation Presented

by

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ABSTRACT

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In recent years, the category "transgender" has evolved to name and describe the identities and experiences of those who transgress traditional categories of sex and gender. Unlike "man" and "woman," where the boundaries of identity are generally understood to have clear and distinct (although contested) definition, the borders of transgender identity necessarily remain nebulous.

This qualitative study focuses on female-bodied individuals who identify as transgender but do not physically change their bodies through surgery or hormonal treatments. There is a conspicuous deficiency of information about female-to-male transsexuals, and especially about female bodied non-transsexuals—those who identify as transgender, but not transsexual. Therefore, it is important to examine not only who chooses to claim this identity and their process of doing so, but how they construct and make meaning of gender in their daily lives.

Transgender identity offers an intriguing arena in which to explore the connection between experiences of self, gender, and the body. The specific questions this study

addresses include: Why and how do female-bodied people claim a transgender identity? How do they understand their transgender identity? How do they manage and make this identity known? The participants explain how they understand their transgender identity and address the themes of gender identity, gender presentation, and the body.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Outside of academia, it remains a common assumption that sex and gender are indistinguishable, essential, and unquestionable characteristics of human beings. However, since the 1970s, when second wave feminists offered a serious critique of the longstanding partnership between sex and gender (Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Rosaldo, 1980; Unger, 1979), social and physical scientists, feminist scholars, philosophers, and others have engaged in de-pairing and deconstructing gender and sex (Butler, 1990; Deaux & Kite, 1987; Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Garber, 1989; Goffman, 1976; Kessler, 1998; Sherif, 1982). Many social scientists came to associate sex with biological and physical characteristics, and perceive gender as a socially constructed and culturally rooted phenomenon (Burke, 1996; Kessler & McKenna, 1978; Rosaldo, 1980; Sherif, 1982; West & Zimmerman, 1987). In recent years, non-traditionally gendered individuals have become more visible and vocal (Denny, 1992; Devor, 1989, 1997a; Feinberg, 1993, 1996; Lucal, 1999; Scholinski & Adams, 1997), once again calling attention to the relationship between sex and gender.

Coined in the 1970s, transgender referred originally to people who lived full-time in the gender opposite to their biological sex, but did not seek sex reassignment surgery (Prince, 1976). In the 1990s, the category of transgender evolved as an umbrella term to describe the identities and experiences of those who transgress traditional categories of sex and gender, including transsexuals, who physically change their bodies (Bornstein, 1994). As a personal identity, transgender is used by people who "feel a need to express a gender identity different from the one society associates with their genitals" (Rothblatt,

1995, p. 17). For many, transgenderism is an expression of self (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998).

Unlike "man" and "woman," where the boundaries of identity are generally understood to have clear and distinct (although contested) definition, the borders of transgender identity necessarily remain nebulous (Bolin, 1994; Cromwell, 1999; Gagne, Tewksbury, & McGaughey, 1997; Halberstam, 1998; Hale, 1998). Therefore, it is important to examine who claims this identity, their reasons for doing so, and how they construct and make meaning of gender in their everyday lives.

Transgender people are "coming out" more than ever before, including in the academy (Wilson, 1998). A recent Google search for "transgender" located 1,740,000 sites (Dec. 12, 2002). A recent poll reveals that 70% of Americans have heard the word transgender, and 61% believe that we need laws to protect transgender people from discrimination (Human Rights Campaign, 2002). As of early 2003, seven colleges and universities have proactively adopted transgender inclusive non-discrimination policies, and several others are bound by existing non-discrimination laws covering gender identity transgender in that state (http://www.transgenderlaw.org, December, 2002). Many public school systems have had to address issues of gender difference among transsexual teachers (Feld, 2002; Kim, 2000), transgender-identified students (Denizet-Lewis, 2002), and students' who present an atypical gender expression (Brink, 2002; Pfeiffer & Daniel, 2000; T. Shapiro, 2002). The Human Rights Campaign (2002) survey found that 77% of people surveyed believe transgender youth should be able to attend public school. Two states—California and Minnesota—have included gender identity as protected by students' rights laws (www.glsen.org).

In conjunction with the increasing visibility of transgender people, a growing social movement, increasingly distinct from the gay, lesbian, and bisexual (GLB) movement, has evolved. Transgender communities have mobilized to create political action groups (www.genderpac.org), to push for civil rights protection based on perceived or actual gender identity (www.genderlaw.org). College student activists have taken on transgender issues (Gedan, 2002), and there is growing awareness and attention to social justice issues relevant to gender oppression (Bornstein, 1994; Califia, 1997; International Conference on Transgender Law and Employment Policy, 1993; www.genderpac.org).

Oppression has many defining features; it is pervasive, restricting, and hierarchical (Bell, 1997), and restricts social privilege to the dominant group (McIntosh, 1988). In a socially just society, all individuals have a sense of agency, access to resources, and are free from physical and psychological harm (Bell, 1997). In our society, those who transgress gender norms are subject to violence (www.genderpac.org), made invisible (National Gay & Lesbian Task Force, 1991), and are "forced to speak the oppressor's language and submit to his law" (Levine, 1994). Even when they are visible, transgender people have no way of being known except as "highly stigmatized individuals" (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). The lack of legal protection compounds the discrimination transgender people may experience. While a number of cities protect transgender people, only two states explicitly prohibit discrimination based on gender identity (www.genderlaw.org). Conversely, those who conform to gender norms and whose genitals match their gender are seen as the norm (Kessler, 1998; Kessler & McKenna, 1999). Indeed, gender oppression depends on the unquestioned binary

hegemonic gender norms in our society. Even while gender is accepted as a social construction, those who profoundly challenge it are pathologized by some clinicians, social scientists, feminists, and even members of the queer community (Bailey, Kim, Hills, & Linsenmeier, 1997; Chivers & Bailey, 2000; Jeffries, forthcoming; Raymond, [1979]1994; Shapiro, 1991; Vincent, 2000).

An increasing number of female-bodied people identify as transgender. The organization Female-to-Male International (FTMI) formed in 1986, and has grown to include 900 members in 17 countries (www.ftmi.org). American Boyz, a North American organization formed in 1994 for people who were labeled female at birth but who feel that is not an accurate or complete description of who they are[1], holds an annual conference that has grown from about 100 participants in 1997 to an estimated 1,000 in 2002 (Z. Barlow, personal communication, July 13, 2002). Initially, workshops at this conference focused on medical matters related to physical transition, but increasingly, workshops focus on concerns associated with being "genderqueer." As the numbers of those who eschew surgery and hormones ("no-op, no-ho") grow and perhaps begin to outnumber the transsexual population (Ekins & King, 2001), it is essential to conduct phenomenological studies and collect empirical data from which we can begin to understand these diverse experiences.

Statement of Purpose

This phenomenological study focuses on female-bodied individuals who identify themselves as transgender but do not necessarily physically change their bodies through surgery or hormonal treatments. As experience is interpreted, theorized and mediated through the cultural meanings available (Jackson & Scott, 2001), it is important to know

how this population makes sense of this identity. Using qualitative methods, I explore how people who identify as transgender come to understand their identity, and how they express, manage, and make known a gender that others do not understand or recognize. The specific research questions this study examines are:

1. Why and how do female-bodied people claim a transgender identity?
2. How do they understand their transgender identity?
3. How do they manage and make this identity known?

Significance

There is a gap in the literature and far too little empirical research documenting the experiences of those living outside gender norms. Almost exclusively, both theoretical and empirical research on transgender people has focused on transsexuals—those who perceive their gender identity to be in conflict with their assigned sex (Benjamin, 1966; Bolin, 1988; Devor, 1997a; Kando, 1973; Raymond, [1979]1994). Moreover, a review of the literature since the 1960s reveals a bias in favor of male-to-female transsexuals (see Cromwell, 1999; Devor, 1997a; Lothstein, 1983). There is a paucity of information, not only about female-to-male transsexuals, but especially about female-bodied non-transsexuals—those who identify as transgender, but not transsexual (Cromwell, 1998; Garber, 1989). The result is that empirical knowledge about female-to-male transsexuals and transgender people is minimal.

Denny (1993) asserts that the majority of writing about transgender people is written by clinicians for clinicians about how to "deal" with these people. Gagne, Tewksbury, and McGaughey (1997) report that most social science research on transgender people focuses on psychological and psychiatric concerns. The dominance of

the etiological and medicalized perspective has left the lived experiences of transgender people mostly unexamined.

In contrast to a medicalized perspective on gender variance, a social justice perspective assumes that the hegemony of gender expectations and roles is limiting and oppressive to everyone. Like heterosexism, which assumes compulsory heterosexuality to be the standard by which all sexualities are assessed (Rich, 1980), gender oppression presumes the gender normativity of men and women, and deems gender variance as deviant. In this study, I assume that a transgender identity is an acceptable identity that needs no justification or etiological explanation. The goal of this dissertation is to understand the experience, rather than justify or explain it.

Lorber (1994) conceptualizes gender as a social structure—a taken-for-granted system that demands conformity to a binary system linking masculinity and maleness, and femininity with femaleness. In addition to being a major social status experienced by individuals, she contends, gender is also "a social institution" (p.15) that helps humans organize their lives. Its importance is linked with the need for clarity around "appropriate" sexual partners (p. 65).

Most people can relate to the limitations of gender, whether it is through gender expression (clothing, make up, hair, etc), occupational options, or family expectations. As Bornstein (1994) stresses, "Eventually the gender system lets everyone down" (p. 80). Given the institutionalized construction of gender, Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) argue, gender cannot be successfully renegotiated at the individual level. As a result, "we have no social place for a person who is neither a woman nor a man" (Lorber, 1994, p. 96). Moreover, Butler (1990) notes that we regularly punish those who "fail to do their gender

right" (p. 140). Because transgender people challenge the notion that there are only two genders, deconstructing gender has tremendous implications for the division of power in our culture, which is dependent upon the binary gender system commonly accepted as "normal" and "natural." Lorber (1996) calls for us to note "deviant cases," not simply as markers of the boundaries of "normal," but as reminders that we must also question the construction of those normalized categories. This population embodies the challenge to those categories.

Collectively, the experiences of those who live on the margins of gender may help us to realize methods of dismantling the limits of the many dualistic notions that exist within our culture. In order to work against gender oppression, we need to understand how it affects those who experience it. A better understanding of the specific reasons why people experience themselves as outside gender norms, and how they manage those feelings, may help instigate acceptance among those who simply cannot fathom that experience. This population embodies the changing attitudes towards gender, and actualizes the importance of deconstructing social identities.

This work comes at a time when more and more young people are claiming a transgender identity, or are at the very least, demanding the right to express their internal sense of gender identity (Denizet-Lewis, 2002; Pfeiffer & Daniel, 2000; Zolten, 2001). This is true not only for college students, but for schoolchildren as young as 6 years old (see Cloud, 2000). In the last 20 years, many college campus gay student organizations have transformed from being "Gay" organizations to "Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, and Transgender" groups. For example, The Stonewall Center, the gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgender resource center at the University of Massachusetts, added "transgender" in

1995. High school administrators increasingly have to address gender nonconformity as a matter of policy (Brink, 2002; T. Shapiro, 2002). A 2000 lawsuit brought by Pat Doe (a pseudonym) resulted in a court order for the Brockton, MA school system to allow Pat to "dress as a girl at school" (Pfeiffer & Daniel, 2000). In addition to students who experience gender differences, there are other stakeholders in school systems, such as parents, teachers, and community members, for whom transgender issues are central (Anthony, 2002). Therefore, it is important that educational systems take steps to address transgender issues in school before they are forced to address them in court. This work adds to the literature that educational systems may access in their efforts to understand transgender issues.

Definitions

A disentanglement of sex, gender identity, gender presentation, and sexual orientation is essential if one is to understand the assumptions embedded within any perspective on gender variant people. Like a house of cards, it is almost impossible to pull them apart without the entire structure crumbling. In our culture, sex, gender, and sexual orientation have been intertwined to the point where most people resist the notion that there is any other way to think about them. However, it is only by looking at each of these concepts independently that we can fully understand the limitations of modern sex, gender, and sexual orientation paradigms, as well as the potential of knocking down this structure.

Secondly, transgender is an umbrella term encompassing many identities, including transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites, intersexuals, and other gender blenders, each of whom make sense of their identities in different ways. Although this

research will focus only on female-bodied non-transsexual people, it is important to make clear the commonly held distinctions among these identities.

Sex, Gender, Gender Identity, Gender Presentation, and Sexual Orientation

In U.S. culture, sex and gender are obligatory and are assigned to us at birth as a two-part unit. Sex is generally thought of as biologically based, with the physical body, hormones, and chromosomes indicating sex. Because it is rare that hormones and chromosomes are tested at birth, sex is designated solely on the physical appearance of the genitalia (Kessler, 1998). The categories of female and male are putatively seen as exhaustive, mutually exclusive, and immutable (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). However, some people believe that sex, like gender, is also socially constructed (Fausto-Sterling, 1993; Griggs, 1998; Kessler, 1998). The term "female-bodied" recognizes that an individual was assigned as female or has a female body, in biological terms (Cromwell, 1999, p. 29).

Though gender has traditionally been viewed as a natural and essential counterpart to sex, it is currently interpreted by many as an ascribed status which designates the "psychological, social, and cultural aspects of maleness and femaleness" (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p. 6). It is evident that gender, gender roles, and gender presentation are susceptible to cultural definitions and can change over time (Rosaldo, 1980). Distinguishing between sex and gender reminds us that these socially constructed expectations are not "natural" or biologically based.

Gender identity is the internal, private experience of one's gender; in essence, it is a "self-attribution" of gender (Kessler & McKenna, 1978, p. 8). Correspondingly, gender roles are social, public, with implied expectations, obligations, and privileges associated

with each gender. Femininity and masculinity are "ideological constructions whose human manifestations (women and men, girls and boys) are recreated in each generation according to the intermeshing requirements of social, cultural, economic, and biological necessities" (Devor, 1989, p. 33). People rely on cultural constructions of femininity and masculinity to indicate their membership in their sex or gender (Devor, 1989).

Gender presentation refers to the self-presentation an individual carries out, in terms of relying on or denying gendered expectations of appearance. As Butler (1990) postulated, gender is a continuous and repeated performance requiring the "reenactment and re-experiencing of a set of meanings already socially established" (p. 140). Gender is an act of doing, rather than being (West & Zimmerman, 1987). In general, we do not distinguish between gender identity and gender attribution. Based on one's gender presentation and social cues, we always attribute gender (Kessler, 1998). It is virtually impossible to interact with someone without attributing to them a gender (Griggs, 1998; Lorber, 1994, 1996). As Lucal (1999) states, "I cannot choose not to participate in it. Even if I try not to do gender, other people will do it for me" (p. 791).

Lastly, sexual orientation refers to one's erotic and emotional attraction to another, usually assumed to be based on biological sex. It includes not only behavior, but also emotional preferences, desire, and fantasy life (Devor, 1993; Lorber, 1994). A limited number of sexual orientations are commonly recognized: heterosexual, homosexual, bisexual, and asexual. The nature of sexual orientation is such that one's sex, and, since sex is conflated with gender, one's gender, are fundamental in determining one's sexual orientation.

Transsexual and Transgender Identities

The terms transsexualism and transvestitism have been in use for much of the 20th century (Hirschfeld, 1910). Seen as similar or equal "pathologies," it wasn't until the late 1960s that these two terms were clearly differentiated from one another. Though in usage since at least 1877 (Pauly, 1986), by the early 1970s, "gender dysphoria" was a catch-all phrase used to encompass all who experienced gender discomfort. In 1980, "gender identity disorder" (GID) was added to the DSMIII to describe individuals with "gender dysphoria," and GID continues to be the medicalized term for these "disorders" (Pauly, 1998).

Distinct from transgender individuals, transsexuals are those who believe that their gender identity is in conflict with their assigned sex (Kessler & McKenna, 1978). For a number of reasons, it is difficult to estimate the prevalence of transsexuals, but some estimate that less than one tenth of 1% of the population is transsexual (Brown, 1996). There are many ways that the sex/gender conflict manifests, including varying levels of body dysphoria, and general discomfort living as the assigned gender. People respond to these feelings in a variety of ways: some privately cross-dress, others live part or full-time in another gender, and some pursue sexual reassignment surgery or other physical changes. Although technically those who have completed sexual reassignment surgery are no longer transsexual, many still identify with the term, which indicates that being transsexual is not only a "condition," but an identity. A transsexual may identify as part of the transgender community, but a transgender person usually would not identify as transsexual unless that individual has initiated or intends to pursue hormonal therapy or sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) (Cromwell, 1999). A non-operative transsexual is

someone who identifies as a sex different than their natal one, but consciously chooses not to pursue physical changes because of cost, inadequate surgical choices, or personal choice (Denny & Green, 1996).

A broader category than transsexual, transgender is a social definition which includes "individuals of any sex who are incompatible with and/or beyond specific gender assignments, or who are preoperative or postoperative transsexuals, cross-dressers, transvestites, and transgenderists" (Cromwell, 1999, p. 23). Transgender can include any kind of dress and/or behavior interpreted as transgressing gender roles, or as a more specific term uniting the transgender community (Ekins & King, 1998). Devor (1989), and Ekins and King (1998) have offered the use of other terms, such as gender blenders, gender reversal, gender mobility, and gender migration, but so far, they are not commonly used. Transpeople have also developed "native" or "emic" terminologies including transperson, F2M, FTM, and transman (Cromwell, 1999, p. 24).

There is no monolithic transgender experience or identity. Indeed, Bornstein (1994) suggests that one of the difficulties of the transgender movement is that transgender identity is one that must be claimed, consequently bringing together an eclectic group of people. Like other identities, the meaning of transgender is constantly evolving and changing.

Though many people use transsexual and transgender interchangeably, others use the term transgender to be distinct from the medicalized term transsexual (Cromwell, 1999; Richards, 1997). In this study, I make the distinction between transsexual and transgender and use the latter to distinguish those who do not pursue physical changes to their bodies from "true" transsexuals (Benjamin, 1966), who are usually considered pre-

operative, post-operative, or non-operative. The identity of transgender removes the "op" from the equation (Denny, 1997). This is especially important when considering female-to-male transpeople, as there are "no clear-cut pre and post statuses" (Cromwell, 1999, p. 23).

While a variety of identities are included in the category of transgender, this work focuses specifically on the experiences of transgender-identified female-bodied individuals who do not necessarily intend to pursue physical changes to their bodies. In the next chapter, I present relevant literature and the conceptual frameworks I utilize for this study. In chapter three, I discuss the methods I used to collect and analyze the data, and the limitations of this study. In chapters four and five, I describe the data and offer my analysis. This work concludes in chapter six with conclusions and implications for further research.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

An appropriate literature review for this dissertation includes an overview of the perspectives that have influenced gender and transgender theory, including essentialist, social constructionist, and postmodern perspectives. The past hundred years have offered a range of perspectives on the nature and origin of gender. These historical perspectives offer a context for creating new understanding about how people experience gender. The general theories on gender intertwine with perspectives on transgender behavior, desire, and identity. The various perspectives that have attempted to understand the existence of transgender and transsexual people remain influential and provide the context for a current understanding of how transgender-identified people make sense of their experiences and identities.

As the human body is linked—whether appropriately or not—with gender identity, it must be considered when examining transgender experiences. Increasingly, the body is understood as a material basis with socially constructed meaning (Richardson & Shaw, 1998) and as a locale for theory building. Understanding how the body is "represented, regulated and used to resist" (Richardson & Shaw, 1998) offers a framework for this work. As Giddens (1991) points out, identity formation is a reflexive process involving the body. We cannot understand the self without understanding the body's role in that process.

In examining the literature regarding gender throughout this century, it is important to remember that although there was a purported common language, the meaning of a variety of words was inconsistent. More significantly, the terms sex and

gender were sometimes used interchangeably, and sex, gender, and sexual orientation were often conflated. Moreover, gender presentation and gender role were thought tantamount to a person's internal sense of sex and gender.

In addition to the literature on gender, transgender, and the body, I offer three interconnected theoretical perspectives important to this dissertation: social interaction, symbolic interaction, and Plummer's (1995) story approach are central to my data analysis.

Gender

Until recently, most research on gender focused on the differences between men and women (Howard & Hollander, 1997), and treated gender as an individual experience. Given that these differences were presupposed, the next step was to determine their cause. The dominant perspectives on the "nature" of gender have included among others: essentialists, social constructionists, and post-modernists. Each perspective offers an understanding of the origins of gender. It is important to consider briefly the contributions of these theories to our understanding of the "nature" of gender.

Gender is Essential

The essentialist perspective, which was dominant until the late 1960s, tends to focus on the biologically rooted "natures" of women and men, clearly favoring the centrality of the body. Physical differences between men and women are assumed (Oakley, 1972). Sex is equated with gender, and the body determines sex. Fuss (1989) defines essentialism as "a belief in the real, true essence of things, the invariable and fixed properties which define the 'whatness' of a given entity" (p. xi).

John Money (1972) assumed gender was a fixed entity, present at birth, affected by family dynamics, and transfixed by age three. A co-founder of the Johns Hopkins research project on transsexual and sexual reassignment surgery, Money is a socio-biologist who wanted to understand the biological basis for gendered behavior. Money is widely cited, widely accepted, and his work is considered hallowed in sex research (Raymond, 1979, p. 44). His view that sexology was a territory best explored by endocrinologists and surgeons demonstrates his paradigm.

Though he distinguished between gender and sex, Money believed that gender had biological origins—that prenatal hormones were central to gender development. More specifically, Money believed that an individual was born with particular prenatal hormones that were then influenced by social factors, and one's gender identity became fixed by around 18 months. Money's most renowned work, the John/Joan case, in which a male infant was accidentally castrated in a routine circumcision and then raised as a girl (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972), was the sole evidence for this theory (see also Colapinto, 2000). Despite Joan's later reversal to "John," this case study continues to influence sex and gender research.

Psychological Theories

Freud's psychoanalytical theories in the early part of the 20th century impacted theories about gender well into the 1970s (e.g., Chodorow, 1978; Stoller, 1968, 1974). His early theories postulated that femininity was an outgrowth of masculinity—the "natural" state of being (Person & Ovesey, 1999). Those influenced by his theories often challenged his notion of gender construction, but continued to rely on a psychoanalytical paradigm (e.g., Horney, 1924).

Stoller's (1968; 1985) theories of gender came mainly from his work with effeminate boys, and depended on psychoanalytical interpretations of family dynamics. Stoller viewed gender as culturally determined "post-natally," and that it could develop independently of maleness or femaleness (Stoller, 1969, p. 9). Although he believed in a learning process that began at birth, he also gave credence to biological forces that "augmented" gender identity. In sum, masculinity and femininity, which he viewed with a traditional lens, grew from an interplay between biology, learning, and psychodynamics (Stoller, 1968, p. xvi). Gender, he declared, was best studied as an aspect of the mind.

Although he distinguished gender from gender identity and gender role, and sex from genitals, he believed that in "normals," they "matched" (Stoller, 1968, p. 252). For example, he suggested that femaleness, with an accompanying sense of femininity, frequently leads to "women's tasks and pleasures, including marriage, vaginal intercourse, childbearing, and appropriate mothering" (Stoller, 1968, p. 56). He also distinguished between a sense of maleness (dependent on the boy's relationship to his penis), which he believed was permanently fixed by age three, and a sense of masculinity or manliness, which was taught. Given the incontrovertible nature of gender, Stoller felt it unwise to attempt to change one's gender identity after early childhood.

The main impact of the psychoanalytical theories is the idea that there is a core gender identity. Though Money and colleagues had established that there was a difference between gender role and gender identity, social and behavioral scientists still presumed a "natural" gender associated with each sex. Whether this core gender identity was hormonally or psychologically determined, it was always assumed to be essential. Variance from male=masculine/man and female=feminine/woman was deemed deviant

or a disorder (at this time, homosexuality was included among these theories) (Ovesey & Person, 1999).

Social scientists and clinicians presumed the essential and indisputable nature of sex and gender, with a few exceptions, until the 1960s and 1970s, when socialization and other interaction-oriented theories (e.g. Chodorow, 1978) overtook the influence of essentialist theories. In this era, gender-identity acquisition became the focus, especially in terms of family and parent-child relations (Kessler & McKenna, 1978).

While social scientists and others understood gender as something that was learned, rather than as something innate, gender still remained closely tied with gender roles and the construction of masculinity and femininity; few questioned the reification of gender itself. Even those who questioned the immutability of sex, such as clinicians working with transsexuals, presumed a veritable partnership between sex and gender (Money, Hampson, & Hampson, 1955). Although gender socialization theorists assume gender is learned, like other research on gender, they continue to focus on dichotomous differences between women and men (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 34), rather than on the construction of gender itself.

Social Construction

A social constructionist perspective offers a critique of gendered social roles and expectations and the limitations associated with the dichotomous construction of masculinity and femininity. Cross-dressing and other cross-gender behaviors are seen by social constructionists as the result of social constrictions on gender expression (Bullough, 1991; Raymond, [1979]1994). In this sense, cross-gender behavior is not

inherently pathological; social intolerance of gender boundary crossing in effect creates a social problem.

The feminist movement of the 1970s influenced the distinction of sex from gender, and established a connection between sex and the body, and gender with social roles and expectations (Rubin, 1975, 1984). In contrast to essentialism, social constructionism is a belief that a social phenomenon is not an inherent essence, but must be understood as a configuration of cultural meanings which are generated through social relations (Harding, 1998, p. 9). With this in mind, cultural institutions, norms, practices and relations are studied for their part in the creation of social life.

As feminist scholars challenged biological determinism and the assumed universality of gender, social constructionists approached a variety of interrelated ideas, such as sexuality and gender, with a constructionist perspective (Vance, 1991).

Foucault's (1978) *The History of Sexuality* greatly influenced the transition from seeing sexual orientation as a biologically rooted and essential aspect of one's being to a culturally and historically situated construction.

Social construction theories assume that social reality is created through social interaction and the interpretation of those interactions (Howard & Hollander, 1997, p. 35). It is within these daily negotiations that reality is constructed, and is situated contextually within culture and time. Applied to gender, a social construction approach assumes that gender is created and maintained through our daily interactions. In his analysis of the ways that Agnes, a male-to-female transsexual, had to learn how to be a woman, Garfinkle (1967) demonstrated that gender is "accomplished" through everyday behavior. Gender, then, is constructed in part through performance. These "gender

displays" (Goffman, 1976) of "doing" gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987) are not a choice, but instead compulsory (Lorber, 1994; Lucal, 1997), as interactions are always gendered. These performances of gender contribute to the construction and maintenance of dualistic categories, and is how "social interaction sustains broader, macro-level systems of gender hierarchy" (Howard & Hollander, 1997). As an example, Claudine Griggs (1998) lived for almost 20 years as a woman before seeking sexual reassignment surgery. Although she long considered surgery, she felt able to wait because "90% of her suffering was alleviated by her ability to pass as a woman." As she states, "The operation was important, but it was not life threatening, and my ability to pass as a woman was" (p. 43).

Bolin (1988) examined how "genetic men"[2] are transformed into psycho, social, and somatic women in a culture that regards gender as genetic and non-negotiable. Though our current culture might not readily view gender as genetic, most do believe that gender is immutable. By explicating the "rites of passage" that characterize the transitional phases of leaving the male role and acquiring a female one, Bolin provided clear evidence of the social construction of gender. By observing the interactions among a particular group of transsexuals, Bolin noted the norms, rules, and sanctions that characterized the forum in which the completion and sharing of rites of passage took place. Her findings are important in that they attest to the importance of socialization in the process of becoming a particular gender, no matter what stage in life.

In terms of sexual orientation, Harding (1998) argues that a binary system is possible and meaningful "only in the context of the prior and incontrovertible existence of gendered identity as an unambiguous duality" (p. 44). We are always attributed a

gender (Kessler & McKenna, 1978); to be "genderless" is too disconcerting and disturbing for most to tolerate. In other words, without distinct genders, we cannot construct sexual orientation in terms of "opposite" or "same." Frye (1983, p. 22) reminds us that the monitoring of sexual attraction in relation to other people is dependent on the ready recognition of the sex of others—prior to our feeling attracted. It is for this reason that gender, as a representation of sex, is impossible to escape.

Post-modern theories

Butler (1990) argues that gender is not an attribute of an individual, but instead is an act which must be repeatedly performed. In other words, gender is doing, rather than being; it is compulsory. West and Zimmerman (1987) argue that gender is a routine, methodical, and recurring accomplishment. By viewing gender as an accomplishment, it becomes interactional and institutional; again, not an individual matter. Gender, therefore, is not a stable identity, it is one constituted through time through the repetition of acts (Butler, 1990; West & Zimmerman, 1987). The categories of man and woman, consequently, are never static; each is perpetually under construction (Harding, 1998). Accordingly, we must examine the notion of gender expression, for this implies that there is something essential to express. With this construction of gender, there is no one true gender. Hence, since gender has no particular properties, it cannot be copied. In this retreat from equivocating genitals, sex, gender, gender role, and gender identity, we are at liberty to explore other conceptions of sex, gender, and the body.

Although Garfinkel (1967) and West and Zimmerman (1987) each proposed the idea that gender was an act—an everyday performance—it was Butler's (1990) post-modern work on the performativity of gender that catapulted this concept into everyday

academic usage. Butler further emphasized that gender is a "*stylized repetition of acts*" (p. 140, emphasis in the original). It is in the repeated performance, she asserted, that gender is created. As a fluid and ephemeral entity, Butler argued, gender is a contextual way of being, rather than a stable identity. Since gender is a creation based on continuous performance, it cannot ever exist outside the bounds of time or culture, nor outside performativity. There is no tangible essential gender, nor is there any core gender identity. In fact, there is no "gender identity behind the expressions of gender" (p. 25). Gender is not a "fact", but an "act" (p.140).

A post-modern paradigm assumes that there is no "Truth," but many truths. Therefore, unlike most of the previous theories, which were mostly concerned with how and why men and women are different, Butler questioned the very existence of gender as "Truth" by asserting that there is no "essence" behind gender. She shifted the focus from gender's origin to its constant creation. She further asserted that the body is the "taken for-granted ground or surface upon which gender significations are inscribed," (p. 129) and argued that both gender and the body are social constructs. The body therefore, becomes the place where gender is "instituted and inscribed" (p.136).

In sum, Butler's work upset all previous assumptions about sex and gender and has by many accounts been the most influential work in recent years. Prosser (1998) contends that Butler's (1990) work "secured transgender as a touchstone of lesbian and gay theory" (p. 24). Although not everyone's reading of *Gender Trouble* has been as she intended (Butler, 1993), transgender subjects have come to be seen as the empirical evidence of gender performativity.

Transsexual and Transgender Literature

In conjunction with the principal theories on the origins of gender, there have been overlapping theories specific to those considered "gender-deviant." Researchers from a variety of disciplines have investigated transgender identity, including anthropologists, psychologists, and medical clinicians. Just as people have tried to explain why men and women are "different" from each other, they have tried to understand why some people don't seem to fit into the categories of men and women. Etiology composed—and continues to frame—the major focus of most research; what causes this "condition" and how can we "treat" it?

Transsexual discourses have been used to "diagnose, classify, regulate, and produce transsexed bodies" (Hale, 1995, p. 2). As evident in the construction of "treatments," transgenderism has long been treated as an individual "disorder." Whether it was considered a physical or mental problem, the focus was always on the cause of the problem—within the individual—and how to change that person through behavioral therapy (so that their feelings would match their body), or through changing their body (to match their internal sense of gender identity). The dichotomous system of both sex and gender was rarely questioned, and in fact, traditional indicators of gender were used as a measure of success of the outcome of the various treatments that transsexuals underwent. In essence, clinicians viewed individuals who felt they did not fit into the socially constructed identity of man or woman as pathological.

With the categories of man and woman as the standard and sole possibilities, transsexuality was the sole option—moving from one sex to the other. Although some addressed transvestitism, it was usually confused with and conflated with transsexualism

(Hamburger, 1953; Hirschfeld, 1910; Stoller, 1968; Woodhouse, 1989). Other forms of transgender expression received little or no attention. While in later years there were some other voices in the fray (Prince, 1976), the medical model remained the dominant paradigm for many decades.

The majority of both theoretical and empirical research on transgender people has focused on transsexuals (Benjamin, 1966; Bolin, 1988; Kando, 1973; Raymond, [1979]1994). Of that literature, the vast majority of it examines male-to-female transsexuals. Consequently, perspectives on male-to-female transsexuals dominate a review of historical perspectives of transgender people. This is not to say that female-to-male transsexuals did not exist or receive medical attention. However, the focus was clearly on biological males, which provides a distinct example of the early fusion of sexism and homophobia. Historically, females have been marginalized, silenced, and denied access to resources. It is therefore not surprising that even within the realm of transsexuality, they were outside the parameters of attention or ignored altogether. In addition, female-to-male transsexuals would ultimately gain privilege and power by becoming men; therefore, there was little focus or attention to their experiences.

Like general theories about gender, the dominant understanding of transgender people has progressed from an essentialist viewpoint that individualized and pathologized transgender people, to one that assesses gender as a social construct which dictates gender roles, gender presentation, gender identity, and sexual orientation.

Early sexologists

In the early 20th century, the majority of sexologists perceived sexuality (and thus, gender) through a moral or psychoanalytical lens. Conflating sexuality, gender, and sexual orientation, sexologists such as Magnus Hirschfeld (1910) and Havelock Ellis (1936) established a tradition of exploring individual sexual behavior and social patterns of sexuality. While some sexologists such as psychiatrist Krafft-Ebing (1877) viewed gender-deviant people (this included homosexuals) as immoral and in need of a "cure," others such as Hirschfeld and Ellis were primarily interested in understanding its existence. Freud's psychoanalytic influence in the 1920s and 1930s permeated later views on transsexuality and sexual orientation, and helped shift understandings of gender and sexuality from a moral perspective to a disease model.

The medical model

With its origins stretching as far back as the latter part of the 19th century (Krafft-Ebing, 1877), the medical model began to take hold as a dominant force in the 1950s. The clinical view, dominated by biological and psychological orientations, employed physiological and psychodynamic explanations for "gender-deviant" behavior, with the ultimate goal of eradicating this "condition." In contrast to a moral problem, perceiving this issue as a clinical condition implied that it could be treated and before long, cured. By viewing transgender feelings as symptomatic of a pathological and physiological condition, clinicians could justify various treatments such as hormonal, endocrinological, aversion, and psychotherapies. Later, this attitude wedded the medical establishment with transsexuality through clinic policies, which proffered the medical industry the capability

to "regularize" transsexual transitions in the form of stages and schedules, creating an artificial timeline.

Kessler (1998) suggests that there are four fundamental assumptions embedded in the medical model whose recognition helps us deconstruct this perspective and disengage our dependence on this model. First, the medical model assumes that genitals are naturally dimorphic, and in fact, are the markers of gender. Secondly, clinicians assume that genitals that don't match one or the other of the binary sexes should be adjusted to fit. Thirdly, gender is dimorphic because genitals are. And lastly, the underlying assumption in Money (1972; 1955) and other's perspectives, is that physicians and psychologists have "legitimate authority to define the relationship between genitals and gender, and furthermore, to use their medical authority to manage a particular version of gender" (Kessler, 1998, p. 7). This last assumption, that clinicians have the right and authority to control, "gatekeep," and direct the "treatment" of transgender people, is the most damaging. Its acceptance has convinced many transgender people, especially transsexuals, that the "doctor knows best."

Harry Benjamin and Hormonal Therapy and Sexual Reassignment Surgery

In 1953, American Christine Jorgensen traveled to Denmark to obtain sexual reassignment surgery performed by Danish doctor Christian Hamburger. Though hers was not the first sexual reassignment surgery, it was to date, the most famous. With Jorgenson's notoriety, the era of the medical model of transsexuality commenced. When news hit the United States, both Jorgenson and Hamburger were besieged with requests for surgery, and eventually they referred people to Harry Benjamin, a physician at Johns Hopkins. In 1966, Benjamin helped establish the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic

(JHGIC), the first such clinic in the United States, and it soon served as a model for other clinics. Benjamin's (1966) *The Transsexual Phenomenon*, a guide for transsexuals seeking sexual reassignment surgery (SRS) became the dominant model of treatment for individuals "suffering" from what was eventually called Gender Identity Disorder. Later, Benjamin devised evaluation guidelines for transsexual surgery candidacy, thus establishing "Standards of Treatment" that are still in use today (see Appendix in Bullough, Bullough, & Elias, 1997).

Benjamin (1966) felt that the mind could not be adjusted to the body, and thus the adaptation of the body to the mind was justified. Although he distanced himself from psychoanalytical theories of transsexuality, he did advocate early psychiatric intervention to *prevent* transsexuality, transvestitism, and homosexuality. He felt it was important to "maximize the possibility of heterosexual outcome," conflating gender and sexual orientation (Califia, 1997, p. 67). The conjoining of sex and sexual orientation here indicate a clear assumption of heterosexuality. Benjamin's guidelines for sexual reassignment surgery require(d) that potential clients live as the new gender for a period of time prior to surgery. Surgery was permitted only if the client was able to fulfill the "real life test." Success was subjectively defined by a therapist, and was usually based on stereotypical roles and limited notions of gender. As both Hamburger and Benjamin were advocates of hormonal therapy and SRS for transsexuals, they established an absolute dependence of transsexuals on the medical establishment (Mackenzie, 1994).

From the 1950s-1970s, transsexuals were defined as being "trapped in the wrong body," which presumed there is a "right" body and assumed a sex/gender congruence. The goal of SRS was clearly to change the individual from one sex to the "opposite" sex;

transsexuals were led to believe that surgery would "cure" them, and that their bodies would be close to the "real thing." As MacKenzie (1994) suggests, although the proposed purpose of sexual reassignment surgery was to create genitals that matched one's internal sense of gender, the indirect, or perhaps not so unconscious result was to manufacture, reinforce, and transmit gender ideology.

The Western sex and gender code expects a linear relationship between the sex organs, gender behavior, and sexual orientation (Mackenzie, 1994). This is especially clear in the explicit expectations that post-operative transsexuals would be heterosexual and would function in traditional gender roles. Success was measured by the client's ability to "pass," and by the inclination and ability to conform to the gender role and expectations that matched the new sex. Furthermore, surgical success was equivalent to genitals that could function for heterosexual sex, as there were clear expectations that transsexuals would engage in missionary position sexual intercourse. There was little attention to the psychological feelings or the socio-economic success of post-operative transsexuals. As MacKenzie (1994, p. 70) suggests, we must question whether the suffering of transsexuals came not from their gender discomfort, but from a cultural ideology that enforced binary sex and gender roles.

John Money

The influence of John Money is enduring, as Money is synonymous with sexology, and is still repeatedly cited. Even his case study of "John/Joan" (Money & Ehrhardt, 1972) which has been widely criticized as exploitative and manipulated (Colapinto, 2000; Diamond & Sigmundson, 1997), continues to be cited as *the* evidence for the social nature of gender identity development. Because he believed gender identity

was immutable after 18 months, Money was a strong proponent of sexual reassignment surgery. Like most in the medical model, he conflated gender identity and gender role, and was a firm believer of gender dimorphism and polarization between the sexes. His work with intersexed babies and adults demonstrates his attachment to a binary sex system, and his perspective has changed very little over the years (Money, 1994). Money relied on stereotypical behavior as indicators of gender, and almost reified gender stereotypes—seeing them as part of our "core" being (Raymond, 1979, p. 64). Ironically, though he conducted cross-cultural research and found that indeed, many cultures had examples of differently gendered people, he still believed gender deviance to be abnormal.

In 1979, the landmark Meyers (1979) research report concluded that sexual reassignment surgery did not help transsexuals, thus ending the "transsexual seventies." As evidence of sexual reassignment surgery's failure, Meyers and his associates measured enjoyment of heterosexual intercourse, frequency of psychiatric contact, marriage adjustment, and job and educational level. It was clear that no one in this field could think of sex, sexual orientation, and gender as extricable. Meyers' report supported the shift of causation from biological to psychological.

Psychological and Psychiatric Perspectives

In the 1970s, the major ideologies of the medical model had a different emphasis—clinicians began to view the origin of gender as psychological, with some biological influence. The theories really weren't all that different, but there was a shift away from hormones toward psychodynamics. Rather than a focus on prenatal hormones, the medico-psychiatric model emphasized personality "defects" and early psycho-social

experiences. For example, the "cause" of cross-dressing and transsexuality was thought to be rooted in early childhood experiences or difficulties with developing appropriate gender behavior because of poor role modeling or other family dynamics (Stoller, 1968, p. 183). This paradigm classified transgender people as "sick," keeping the focus on an individual level rather than examining social norms or social prejudice (Talamini, 1982). In many cases, the theories relied on mother-blame to explain causality (Green, 1987; Stoller, 1968). In general, all of the psychological causation theories about transsexuality measured the degree of conformity to culturally defined norms of femininity and masculinity (Raymond, [1979]1994).

Several clinicians are important to the psychological paradigm, including Robert Stoller and Richard Green. Both were mentored by Money, and developed their own theories through their work with him. Lothstein is notable for his contribution to female-to-male transsexual research.

Richard Stoller

An eminent psychiatrist and psychoanalyst, Stoller's (1968) theories attempted to explain the origins of masculinity and femininity, and the reasons for transvestitism and transsexualism. Stoller believed that the etiology of transsexuality and transvestitism could be located in a "biopsychic force"—innate traits set in motion by family dynamics, particularly the mother-son relationship. Basically, Stoller (1968) believed that "tremendously solicitous" mothers smothered their sons, causing them to over-identify with their mothers (p. 98). Additionally, an absent father caused the mother, suffering from penis envy, to turn to her son for fulfillment. The mother, pathological in her own ways, including being "feminine in a boyish manner," and uninterested in sex or

heterosexuality, literally treated the child as an extension of her own body. The lack of proper distancing between mother and son therefore, resulted in the development of a core feminine gender identity in the boy. For the development of his multifaceted theories, Stoller relied exclusively on case studies, making assertions about transsexuality based on just a few individuals.

In terms of treatment, Stoller viewed early intervention as vital for "transsexual children." Although he regarded transsexualism as "a malignant condition irreversible by psychological methods," he believed it was "treatable and reversible" in the small child (Stoller, 1968, p. 140). For this reason, he felt it was vitally important to correctly diagnose "pre-transsexual children," and begin treatment at once. For child transsexuals, the goal of treatment was to break the symbiotic bond between mother and son. For adult transsexuals, Stoller (1985, p. 169) was a reluctant supporter of sexual reassignment surgery, which he saw as a last resort option. Although he favored a psychotherapeutic approach, he also acknowledged that there was no evidence of its success, nor was there a recommended treatment plan.

Like his predecessors, Stoller generally ignored female-to-male transsexuals and transvestites. In fact, he wondered if female transvestites even existed; even though a woman might wear men's clothing and "act" like a transvestite, that didn't make her one (Stoller, 1968, p. 194). As a result of his focus on the rejection of femininity and all things female, Stoller simply dismissed female-to-male transsexuals as extreme forms of homosexuality; in other words, butch lesbians (Stoller, 1985).

Richard Green

Green's (1987) 15-year longitudinal study of 'effeminate" boys, *The Sissy Boy Syndrome*, funded by the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), further extended transsexual studies to include children. Green wanted first to understand why some boys show extensive cross-gender behavior, and secondly to identify the relationship between boyhood cross-gender behavior and adult sexuality—whether it was homosexuality or transsexuality. Green recruited boys considered (by their parents) to be effeminate because they preferred to play with girls and girls' toys, they enjoyed dressing up in girls' clothing, and they did not enjoy "rough-and-tumble" play. Green evaluated the boys by assessing their toy preference, how they played with dolls, their physical behavior and gestures, such as how they walked and told stories, and with psychological tests. Green believed that "feminine behavior" indicated risk of becoming homosexual. For this inference, Green relied on the stereotype that all gay men are effeminate, essentially equating gender expression and sexual orientation. It eventually became clear that Green had refocused his NIMH study on the link between early gender behavior and sexual orientation.

Since Green wanted to prevent these "pre-transsexuals" from their fate, he developed treatment protocol involving behavioral therapy. Each boy participated in play sessions during which he was rewarded for playing with the "appropriate" gender toys. "Boy toys" were active, aggression oriented toys such as footballs and army toys, while "girls' toys" were appearance oriented, such as play make-up and dress-up clothes. The parents played a prominent role in this treatment, for it was their attention that was given or withheld in response to toy choice. As the children tried to conform to the demands of the

researchers, their self-esteem plummeted (Burke, 1996). Boys were considered "cured" when they rejected feminine behavior and adopted masculine behavior, including a desire for marriage and heterosexual sex.

Like his predecessors, Green's ideology reduced gender to a fixed set of psychological traits that prohibited any serious consideration of how gender is used to structure our social experiences (Mackenzie, 1994, p. 98). A true androcentric misogynist, Green believed that effeminate behavior in boys was caused by a "gender contagion theory." In other words, like Stoller, he believed that boys became feminine by having too much contact with girls and women. This meant that the boy over-identified with girls, and was at extreme risk for eventually desiring a male erotic partner. Once again, the medical model conflated sexual orientation with gender identity.

Leslie Lothstein

Lothstein had worked with Richard Green, been influenced by John Money, and claimed Robert Stoller as his personal mentor. Lothstein's understanding of gender variance was fundamentally rooted in a psychoanalytic understanding of gender development; his perspective did not include any understanding of gender as a social construct.

The publication of Lothstein's *Female-to-Male Transsexuals: Historical, Clinical, and Theoretical Issues* (1983) marked the first work devoted to female-to-male transsexuals. Although the majority of Lothstein's 200 patients were male-to-female transsexuals, he nevertheless included female-to-males in his theories. At the time, so little had been written about female-to-males that his work was, in fact, significant.

Like others within the medical model, Lothstein's position individualized and pathologized transsexualism. His approach conceptualized the transsexual as a person with intrapsychic and interpersonal conflicts best understood in the context of psychoanalytic theory (1983, p. x). Lothstein's theories of female-to-male transsexualism are practically the inverse of Stoller and Green's mother-blaming explanations. He, too, theorized that female-to-male transsexualism was caused by family dynamics in which the mother was insecure. Because the mother is unavailable to appropriately model being "female," daughters turned to male figures in the household to idealize and identify with. By identifying with a male, the child believes she can share in his strength and attain the mother's affirmation and admiration. As in the theories of Green and Stoller, mother is the scapegoat.

Lothstein's approach to treatment was psychotherapeutic rather than surgical. Like Stoller, Lothstein recommended sexual reassignment surgery only as a last-resort, to be used only after other methods of treatment had failed, and that in the event of its use, it be used in conjunction with therapy.

Though he endorsed some negative ideas, Lothstein also confronted a number of important themes that had dominated transsexual ideology. For instance, he addressed the disparity in attention and numbers between female-to-males and male-to-females, the connection between mental illness and transsexuals, and the connection between homosexuality and transsexuality. He also denounced the sensationalism that had dominated news stories and had polarized thinking and made it into a moral, religious, and bioethical issue, rather than a social psychological one.

In his analysis of female-to-male transsexuality, Lothstein believed that they received less attention than male-to-females because we live in a male-centered paradigm. Astutely, he also named the "serious threat" that female-to-male transsexuals pose to male power. Lothstein believed the phenomenon of "female transsexualism" challenged traditional ways of thinking about gender, and implied a revolutionary understanding of maleness, femaleness, and societal sex roles (p. 3). It is striking that although he claimed to be revolutionary, Lothstein continued to refer to female-to-male transsexuals as female transsexuals, even after their surgery, thus ignoring and disrespecting their chosen gender identity.

Gender Identity Disorder and Gender Dysphoria

In 1973, the American Psychological Association voted to eliminate homosexuality from the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders. Not coincidentally, the catch-all diagnosis of "Gender Dysphoria Syndrome" (GDS) was introduced that year; GDS encompassed cross-dressers, transsexuals, homosexuals, and others, and it was not by chance that these disparate identities were seen as one and the same. The construction of GDS allowed clinicians to continue to pathologize gay people.

By 1980, the DSMIII included the diagnosis of Gender Identity Disorder of Childhood, utilizing similar diagnostic criteria to that used in Green's (1987) research. By 1994's edition (the DSM IV), the phrase "of childhood" was eliminated, and Gender Identity Disorder (GID) moved to the Sexual and Gender Identity Disorders section. Criteria for diagnosis continue to include such criteria as "aversion to rough and tumble play, rejection of male stereotypical toys, games and activities", and for girls, "marked aversion toward normative feminine clothing." Many of the characteristics, such as a girl

not wanting to wear girls' clothing or wanting to play with "boys'" toys, simply demonstrate a challenge to standard gender norms. The current edition of the DSM IV classifies Gender Identity Disorder as

> a strong and consistent cross-gender identification and discomfort with one's anatomic sex, often beginning in the early developmental years and evolving over time to include a desire to alter one's self through hormones and surgery (Cole & Meyer, 1998, p. 227).

Burke (1996) charges that the current diagnosis casts a wider net by leaving out the old criteria of "a stated desire to be a boy [or girl]" (p. 65). Since homosexuality is no longer considered pathological, GID is now used as a diagnosis for gay and lesbian adolescents who are viewed as in need of treatment, which includes hospitalization and medication (see Scholinski & Adams, 1997). These "treatments" are based on the mistaken belief that altering one's gender presentation will alter sexual orientation.

The medical model was, and continues to be extremely influential. Despite recent research that contradicts mother-blame and other psycho-dynamic theories (Burke, 1996), the psychological model continues to have a lingering effect on attitudes and research about gender. The many assumptions inherent within the medical model continue to fester in the minds of the general public, and in the professional community.

Rather than simply accepting the variations of sex and gender as natural, and perhaps examining our discomfort with that variation, Benjamin, Money and their followers chose to focus on the etiology and treatment of human sex variation. As Raymond (1979) reminds us, the Johns Hopkins Gender Identity Clinic defined transsexualism as a *medical* problem from the beginning. The influence of John Money is enduring, as Money is synonymous with sexology, and is still repeatedly cited. The work of psychologists and psychiatrists, who created the DSM category of Gender Identity

Disorder has contributed to, if not caused, the dominant cultural attitude towards transsexuality and transgenderism as "sick." General attitudes towards transgender people remain negative and based in pathology; even among tolerant gay and lesbian people, there remains a feeling that transgender people are somehow just not normal (Vincent, 2000).

Social Constructionism

The majority group in any society dictates the norms, values, and culture; for example, by understanding what society pathologizes, we can recognize what society demands of us who wish to be normal (Burke, 1996). In the realm of transgenderism, we can employ a social constructionist perspective to examine how and why some forms of gender or gender expression are privileged, while others are denigrated. In this particular context, social constructionists query what transsexual ideology, transsexuals, transgenders, cross dressers, and the representations of these groups as a whole reveal about contemporary gender attitudes. We must be mindful, however, that the explanations of social constructionism are themselves, constructed.

This approach is markedly different from other perspectives in that it considers the social context in which transgressive gender behavior occurs. Social constructionists contend that cross-gender behavior is not inherently pathological, but that social intolerance of gender boundary crossing in effect creates this social problem. Cross-dressing and other cross-gender behaviors are seen by social constructionists as the result of social constrictions on gender expression. Bullough (1991) argues that transvestism is a social construction that can be seen as a method used to escape the narrow confines of a gender role. Talamini (1982) went so far as to assert that cross dressers are a group

deserving minority status. As a social constructionist, Talamini problematizes social attitudes towards transvestites, rather than the transvestites themselves.

Gender may seem like an innate quality only because we do not have the memory of our body and mind fusing (Burke, 1996). If we argue that gender is a cultural construct, we must consider the possibility that gender is therefore not the direct result of a male or female body (Butler, 1990). Kessler & McKenna (1978) and Kessler (1998) argue that not only is gender a social construct, but sex too is constructed as a dichotomous system rather than being inherently binary. The differences between male and female are not natural, essential, or biological; they are constructed and then used to enforce the "essentialness" of gender (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 137). Transsexuals, therefore, make visible what our culture has made invisible—the "accomplishment of gender" (West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 131).

When we utilize a social constructionist analysis of empirical research, the infinite assumptions of gender and the conflation of sex, gender, and sexual orientation become clear. For example, in her review of the last 30 years of research on gender, Burke (1996) explored how the clinical categorization of Gender Identity Disorder (GID) has been used to diagnose children who did not fit traditional—socially constructed—gender expectations. Burke found that attitudes and behaviors were invariably assumed to be inherently masculine or feminine, rather than constructed as associated with one or the other. There was also a clear belief in the intrinsic nature of masculine and feminine gestures and body movements (Burke, 1996), rather than an understanding that these qualities have been socially assigned to one gender or the other.

Ultimately, a social constructionist perspective challenges us to reconsider the "problem." Are transgender people deviant, aberrant, or abnormal? Or are our restrictive attitudes and expectations about sex, gender, and the body confining? Just as attitudes have gradually changed towards other stigmatized groups, such as homosexuals, alcoholics, the mentally ill, abuse survivors, and others, it is possible for our culture to change its attitudes towards transgender people. In short, in a social constructionist view, the "problem" with transgender people is not the individuals themselves, but the limiting gender roles ascribed to particular bodies in our society.

Based on a critique of traditional gender roles, Raymond ([1979]1994) began to shift the etiological attention of transsexuality from the individual to society. Other social constructionists have extended this paradigm to locate the source of transgender feelings within the limitations of the Western sex and gender code rather than as some essential characteristic. Though polemic, Raymond's ([1979]1994) approach to transsexuality differed greatly from anything else at the time. In her view, transsexualism was a social problem explained by the imposition of binary sex roles and identities that exist in a patriarchal society. Transsexualism's most damaging effect, she felt, was to short-circuit any potential challenge to sex roles. In underscoring the patriarchy, Raymond regarded social context as a key element in understanding the construction of sex and gender.

Distinct from sex, she understood masculinity and femininity to be social constructs and stereotypes of behavior that are culturally prescribed for female and male bodies. By separating femininity from the female body, Raymond viewed male-to-female transsexuals as able to become feminine, but not female. Although Raymond was a social constructionist in the sense that she attributed feelings of gender discomfort to social

norms rather than individual pathology, she concurrently essentialized womanhood by presuming women and men to be distinctly different creatures.

Though she perceived masculinity and femininity to be socially constructed, Raymond viewed sex to be governed by chromosomes *and* the subsequent history of being a chromosomal female or male. In order to be a true (read: essential, natural, real) woman, one must be socialized as such, and most importantly, must experience oppression as a woman. In this sense, Raymond essentialized womanhood by disallowing a male-to-female transsexual from being a woman, based on the lack of a socially constructed history.

Raymond dismissed female-to-male transsexuals—the "ultimate colluders" (p. xxv)—contending that they are women who have been deceived into thinking they need to be men in order to have power. Further, she maintained that female-to-male transsexualism was an evil tool of the patriarchy created to prevent lesbianism.

Raymond's thesis is commonly summarized as blaming of socially constructed sex roles for the existence of transsexuality, implying that if sex role oppression disappeared, so too would transsexuality. Her perspective implies that transgender people have "sold out"—making individual choices, instead of a collective political one, against gender role oppression (Nataf, 1996). Many transsexuals challenge this position and view Raymond's attitude as condescending and dismissive of individual experience.

MacKenzie (1994) echoes many of Raymond's ideas. Her critique of the medicalization of transgenderism identifies the misconception that *gender* can be manipulated through surgery. In addition, she asserts, SRS reduces gender to genitalia and gives the impression that one can become a woman or a man simply by making a

physical change to one's body (MacKenzie, 1994). This reductionist theory, MacKenzie contends, places the power of gender completely and solely on vaginas and penises.

MacKenzie firmly believes that no one can change their sex. Therefore, MacKenzie distinguishes between female-to-man, and male-to-woman, rather than female-to-male, for instance, because she believes that no one can truly become the other sex, only the other gender. Like Raymond, MacKenzie believes transgender people must reject medical diagnoses of their disorder and instead examine the "cultural disorder" that pervades our society. Transsexuals and transgenders can live as the "opposite" sex, she claims, with or without surgery. Being transgender does not mean you have to buy into medical "treatments" in order to reshape your body.

Raymond raised important existential questions about free choice; for example, in a patriarchal society, can transsexuals really freely choose sexual reassignment surgery? Is their choice really their own, given our restrictive gender roles? It is difficult to discuss the social constructionist viewpoint without agreeing that people would not need to change sex if our gender roles weren't so restrictive. Fortunately, it is possible to question the construction of gender roles without completely dismissing the individual experiences of transgender people. How would Raymond view the current growing visibility of non-surgically oriented transgender people?

We need to complicate the traditional model that assigns gender deviance to transsexual bodies, and gender normativity to all others (Halberstam, 1998, p. 153).There are many transgender people who reject medical definitions of their experience. Indeed, the "wrong body" theory ascribes gender confusion only to transsexuals (Halberstam, 1998, p. 163). Transgender discourse asks that we recognize the non-male and non-

female genders already in circulation and presently under construction (Halberstam, 1998, p. 161).

As Butler (1990) put forth, gender is a compulsory performance, and sex and gender are scripted within heterosexist culture and produced through non-volitional performances. Relocating the center of the problem from the individual to the society frees us up to conduct research on issues such as the environmental stresses that affect transgender people, rather than on the psychological issues that might "cause" transgender existence.

Transgender Views and Voices

Recent "body transgendering stories" in which medical authority is questioned, diversity is celebrated, and the certainty of sex and gender is called into question offer a fresh perspective on how the construction of gender affects particular people (Ekins & King, 2001). It is in exploring these stories "whose time has come" (p. 195) that we can appreciate the possibilities of deconstructing and reconstructing gender.

Autobiographical works, beginning with Christine Jorgenson's (1967) have given a voice to transgender experiences. However, with few exceptions, it is only in recent years that transgender people have moved from being written about to doing the writing. In the 1990s, writers and activists such as Leslie Feinberg (1993; 1996), Kate Bornstein (1994), and Riki Wilchins (1997) have linked their lived experiences with their own theories and ideas about sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Additionally, works by Califia (1997), Denny (1998), Griggs (1998), MacKenzie (1994) and others have contributed to a broader understanding of the diversity of transgender experience. Notably, the majority of transgender research and writing encompasses a "white"

perspective. Also, like past research, most empirical research and writing focuses on male-to-female transgender people.

Transgender people are diverse, ranging from assimilationists who want to blend in and become invisible (Rubin, 1996), to radicals who not only reject the dominant culture's definitions of sex and gender, but also challenge the politics of transgender organizations. Even within the community, there are disputes over language, identities, and the meaning of sex, gender, and sexual orientation, in addition to disputes about the boundaries of community. Although there are probably as many views on sex and gender as there are "types" of transgender people, I include here the ideas of some of the more prominent and renowned transgender writers and activists.

Les Feinberg

Les Feinberg is a significant figure in the transgender community. Hir[3] semi-autobiographical novel, *Stone Butch Blues* (1993) describes the story of a young female-bodied person coming of age in the 1960s, who for her survival, at times passes as a man. Feinberg's portrayal of Jess, the protagonist, demonstrated that not all transgender people are transsexual, and in fact, some "straddle the gender line and challenge us to create a new social category" (Califia, 1997, p. 188). With her masculine appearance, Jess at first involuntarily challenged the rules of gender, blending genders but not sex. Later, she passed as a man, not because she felt some internal desire to be one, but because living as an extremely masculine woman was too dangerous. By taking hormones and having "top" surgery, Jess was able to present a male identity and avoid daily harassment and violence. Unfortunately, by passing as a man, Jess endangered her place in the lesbian community and blurred the boundaries of gender and sexual orientation. But Jess never

really wanted to be a man—it was for her own survival that she changed her gender presentation through changing her sex characteristics. As she described, "I don't feel like a man trapped in a woman's body. I just feel trapped." (Feinberg, 1993, p. 158).

Currently, Feinberg is a gender activist who identifies as a transgender person and a masculine woman, and uses the pronouns s/he or "zi". Within transgender circles, Feinberg (1998a; 1998b) identifies as he, while s/he identifies as she in non-transgender circles, in order to prevent hir transgender identity from becoming invisible. Feinberg (1998b) asserts that transgender people are not dismantling the categories of male and female; instead they are opening up a world of possibilities.

Kate Bornstein

Kate Bornstein's (1994) *Gender Outlaw: On Men, Women, and the Rest of Us* took transgender writing beyond personal anecdote into the realm of theory. Bornstein, a male-to-female transsexual, challenged us to examine our presumed "natural" gender, and declared that there are as many "truthful experiences of gender" as there are people who think they have a gender (p. 8). *Gender Outlaw* became a model of gender analysis based on epistemic experience, and was followed by several comparable books (Bornstein, 1998; Feinberg, 1996; Griggs, 1998; Wilchins, 1997). Long a silenced group, transgender people were finally speaking for themselves.

Bornstein's (1994) analysis suggested that not only are gender roles socially constructed, but so too are the genders themselves. The assumption of gender as "natural" and our concomitant inability to question gender acts as a fortress, protecting gender as a monarch. Like Kessler (1998), Bornstein asserted that our belief in the supremacy of the body keeps us locked into resolute identities. By comparing gender to a cult, Bornstein

fingered our somewhat involuntary commitment to it and its omnipotent authority in our lives.

In asserting that there is no gender inequity that doesn't first assume gender, Bornstein linked gender oppression with sexism by asserting that gender is a "class" which oppresses women, rewards men with power and male privilege, and is a foundation for patriarchy. While this was not an original analysis, her suggestion that we completely dismantle the gender "class" system was. Rather than fighting for equality between the genders, Bornstein suggests we fight for the deconstruction of gender. Doing away with gender, she declares, is the key to doing away with the patriarchy, as well as ending the many injustices perpetrated in the name of gender.

With Bornstein's call for the downfall of gender come complications for sexuality, as within our current system, sexual orientation is dependent solely on the gender of one's partner. In rejecting the gender system, we also reject sexual orientation, thus challenging the nature of identity politics of the gay, lesbian, and bisexual community. In decentralizing gender, we open the door to endless possibilities of attraction, based on almost anything imaginable, such as sexual styles or pure genital preference.

Riki Wilchins

Like Bornstein and others, Riki Wilchins (1997) perceives transgenderism as a socially constructed phenomenon caused by our limited views of gender. As a founding member of "Transexual Menace," Wilchins has been a principal activist in gender issues, leading protests and picket lines at murder trials, national conferences, women's festivals, and lectures. Since 1994, Wilchins has been the Executive Director of GenderPAC, a

national lobbying group working on anti-violence and anti-defamation work, community-based research, public relations, field mobilization, grassroots education, and legal advocacy (www.gpac.org).

Gender, according to Wilchins, is a system that punishes bodies for how they look, who they love, and how they feel. Wilchins makes her perspective very clear in describing herself as a "Riki-to-Riki transexual[4]" . . . People say I transgress gender. I don't. I'm just being Riki. It's the gender system that transgresses all over me" (in Goldberg, 1999). As a social constructionist, Wilchins warns of the temptation for transgender people to essentialize their own identities in the course of identity politics. To avoid essentializing, Wilchins suggests we focus on the oppression, or on the "common enemy," as Feinberg (1998b, p. 102) suggested, rather than on our disparate identities.

Like others (Kessler, 1998; Mackenzie, 1994), Wilchins acknowledges that any meaning attributed to the body is socially constructed, and she challenges our resting assumptions about sex being "natural." Rather than the straightforward social constructionist view of understanding gender as cultural and sex as natural, Wilchins alludes to Butler (1990) by suggesting that sex originates in culture when it "genders her body" (Wilchins, 1997, p. 51). Like Kessler (1998), Wilchins argues sex, like gender, is socially constructed—that binary categories have been created, but are not necessarily natural, as we are instructed to believe. By recognizing our specific cultural interpretations of the body, such as someone being "tall," or "black," as evidence of the socially constructed nature of our lives (Wilchins, 1997, p. 37), we can then recognize our tendency to create cultural limitations and restrictions on how we inhabit them.

It is difficult to reconcile the perspective of Wilchins and Bornstein—who claim sex and gender are socially constructed, and especially Wilchins, who continuously cautions us not to essentialize any identity—with their transition from one sex (and gender) to another. Though Bornstein claims she is not a man or a woman in the general sense of the word, she pursued surgery and other means in order to have a female body. Wilchins disbelieves any essentialness of womanhood, "the notion that there is an innate essence to woman is theoretically and factually indefensible," (p. 59), but yet transformed her body in order to present herself as a woman. If there is no essential nature, why not simply proclaim one's self a woman?

Conclusion to Historical and Contemporary Perspectives

The dominant perspectives on both gender and transsexuality demonstrate the difficulties, or perhaps reluctance to pulling apart gender, sex, sexual orientation, and sexuality. An examination of each perspective reveals the underlying assumptions that create the frame and foundation of that view. The acknowledgement of these premises yields a more lucid view of transgender existence, which in turns proffers the opportunity to scrutinize our own assumptions about the nature of gender. The disparate perspectives demonstrate that over time, attitudes and beliefs about transgender people have changed somewhat, but not enough. As the idea that gender is socially constructed has become commonly accepted, transgender identity has taken root.

Each of these perspectives challenges us to think about gender's purpose, or at the very least, gender's significance in our lives. These theories of gender's origin speak specifically to the construction of men and women, masculine and feminine. The construction of a *trans* gender identity may indeed rely on "hegemonic structures of

power and knowledge" (Guess, 1997, p. 157) for definition, but it seems impossible to escape the effects and influence of the standard associations of femininity and masculinity. Most transgender people do rely on the standard definitions of gender in order to reject or feel "outside of" those standards. Whether there is any "Truth" to gender, its impact surely feels considerably important for those drawn to claim the identity of transgender. These theories of gender help set the context in which we can make sense of those experiencing their gender in this particular way.

The Body

While historically, study of the body has been left to the natural sciences, since the 1970s, the body has played a central role in feminist sociological research and activism (Davis, 1997). Foucault (1978) legitimized the study of the body, and poststructuralist, postmodern and other philosophical theories have carried the conceptualization of the body further. The journal *Body and Society* began in 1995, demonstrating the increasing attention to the body as cultural indicator. Feminism brought political attention to the body in debates about reproductive rights, power relations, and the domination and regulation of women's bodies (Davis, 1997). The body continues to play a central role in ethical and political debates. For example, contemporary feminists have utilized the body as a locus to theorize gender and sexual differences (Davis, 1997).

As Jackson and Scott (2001) argue, though we have philosophically conceptualized the body in numerous and extensive ways, we need to look more closely at the lived experience of the body, and at the context in which the body functions. Indeed, the study of the body has been mainly a theoretical endeavor (Davis, 1997).

Beyond the concept or idea of the body, we need to address the connections between social structure, the self, and the body. Marshall (1999) maintains that we don't talk enough about how the body is experienced as a way to get a better theoretical hold on the concept, and encourages more phenomenological studies of the ordinary experiences of the body. She suggests that theorists look at work that "attempts to discern what ordinary states of embodiment mean to the embodied subject" (p. 66). Stories of the body need to be told (Plummer, 1995, p. 156).

Richardson and Shaw (1998) identify three main themes in studying the body through qualitative research. First, we look at how the body is represented. Secondly, we examine social regulation of the body. Thirdly, we can study resistance—strategies used to avoid or challenge the dominant representations and regulations. Thus, it is imperative to study how we represent it, regulate it, and resist categorization.

The Body as Social

While our bodies have a material basis, they also have social meaning. The body is a major way that we recognize and categorize others (gender, race, ethnicity, etc), and is a medium through which we understand our experiences (Jackson & Scott, 2001). "Bodies have no meaning, no significance apart from cultural context, social situation and interaction with others" (Jackson & Scott, 2001), p. 21). The body is socially constructed, and its social meanings are shaped and regulated by social forces (Richardson & Shaw, 1998). In other words, we experience our bodies through the culturally mediated interpretations available to us. How we use our bodies and the social meaning ascribed to them are the product of social relations (Hurst & Wooley, 1982). Understanding the meaning we make of our bodies means we must "sort out . . . how

sexual, 'racial' and other differences intersect and give meaning to [our] interactions with [our] bodies (Davis, 1997, p. 14). In understanding the meanings we make through social interaction within particular social locations, we must consider "power differences and systemic patterns of domination and subordination" (Davis, 1997, p. 14).

Body and Identity

Giddens (1991) suggests that traditional societies provided more stable and clear sources of identity from which people maintained their sense of self. In modern societies, with their mass communication systems, identity formation is a less certain process. Thus, identity formation becomes a reflexive process involving the body.

Featherstone (1991) notes that the body is increasingly seen as a reflection of the inner self. Shilling (1993) asserted that the body is a channel for self expression—it becomes a "project" to be worked out, bound up with a struggle to maintain self identity and control. Jackson and Scott (2001) assert that the body is "inseparable from the totality of the self" (p. 19). Indeed, the ways that we experience our bodies contribute to our experience of our sense of self. For example, how we act sexually sometimes gives us an identity (Parker, 1991). Transgender identity offers an intriguing arena in which to explore the connection between experiences of gender identity and of the body.

Under the "pressure to achieve perfection through technology" (Morgan, 1998, p. 157), people—primarily women—pursue liposuction, plastic surgery, and cosmetic surgery in search of the perfect body (Davis, 1993). While most argue that cosmetic surgery promotes conformity, (MacKendrick, 1998) contends that body modification "refuses the fatalistic view of anatomy in favor of…possibility" (p. 4). By acknowledging women's agency in choice, Davis (1993) terms cosmetic surgery a "resource of sorts in

the power struggle between the sexes" (p. 29). In recent years, body modification has taken on new meaning as a source of identity expression, and indeed, a source of empowerment(Featherstone, 2000).

Body and Gender

As an essential component of identity, gender is announced through the body (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). Griggs (1998) characterizes gender attribution as the fundamental indicator of gender. Some argue that clothing and body together "construct a gendered appearance" (Wilson, 1993, p. 52). Butler (1993) argued that bodies are gendered through the continual (coerced and constrained) performance of gender, and linked gender dichotomy with the construction of normative heterosexuality. Jackson and Scott (2001) assert that Butler failed to conceptualize a "reflexive, social, embodied self in interaction with others" (p. 17). In other words, we need a sense of the ways that "embodied human beings interact with others, reflexively, and with themselves" (p. 18). This work contributes to that end. How do transgender-identified individuals "announce" their gender through their bodies? How does the relationship with the body affect transgender people's sense of a gendered self?

In her own empirical work, Griggs (1998) asked transsexuals why it was important to them that their body represent their internal gender. The central theme, Griggs determined, was that the body is the exclusive means of gender expression. That is, if we think of gender as being an inherent ineffable quality, it remains dependent on the body for its expression. This is important for both gender attribution by others as well as self-image. From her own experience, Griggs believed that the most uncomfortable aspect of gender dysphoria was that it prevented anyone from *knowing* her, and the on-

going cumulative pain of non-existence drove her to sexual reassignment surgery. For Griggs, gender attribution via clothing was not enough—for example, as a child she dressed in girls' clothing, but she still felt like she was a boy in girls' clothing, and that no one would see or accept her gender. Therefore, Griggs believes that the self is gendered, and the body is an extension of the self. Because gender is essentially invisible except as represented through the body, and because gender role is anticipated on the basis of attribution, it is effectively impossible to relate to a feminine gender that is wrapped in by male physiology, or vice versa. She feels that like it or not, we react to the body. Therefore, changing the body is simply the passage to changing attributed gender.

Theoretical Frameworks

While the previous theories provide a context for situating the existence of transgender people in current society, the following ideas provide a theoretical framework for making sense of the data.

Goffman and Social Interaction

Goffman's (1959) *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* offers a theory for understanding the rituals of social relations in daily interaction. When we interact with others in a social situation, we seek information from them about how to define the situation and what is expected of us in it. There are many sources of information, but mostly we rely on our previous experience with individuals like those we encounter; in other words, we apply stereotypes, rely on "reference groups" and other known categories to make sense of new information. The initial information is most important, as it is this information that we use to begin to define a situation.

In each encounter with another person, there are "expressions given"—these are verbal symbols consciously used to convey information—and expressions "given off"—which are those symbols we relay unconsciously or involuntarily. Utilizing "impression management," we try to maintain control over (define) a situation by attempting to influence others' reactions to us. In Goffman's view, we always try to influence how a definition is defined and avoid disruptions of our performance, whether consciously or unconsciously. "Definitional disruptions" are avoided through the use of "preventative practices," either "defensive" or "protective" (p. 13). In Goffman's view, no fostered impression would survive without them.

Goffman believed that the "definitions" of situations were common enough that contradictions did not usually occur. We expect consistency, and we use a "working consensus" to get through most situations (p. 9). That is, as participants in a "situation" that doesn't make sense, we suppress our immediate feelings and instead convey a view of the situation that is acceptable. The "audience" member will overlook a "slip" to maintain his or her own comfort and the "veneer of consensus" (p. 9). For example, if I was presented with someone who presented visually as a woman, but had an extremely deep, low voice, I would likely ignore the discrepancy—for my own comfort and the other person's. People feel threatened when they think they might be being duped—and therefore they are likely to support others' fronts, as long as the impression is not broken. When a situation is no longer definable based on our possible understandings, people may become hostile, embarrassed, or experience other uncomfortable feelings. In other words, if it became clear that this person in fact was not a woman, I might become angry or uncomfortable.

According to Goffman, when someone takes on an established social role, there is a prescribed "front" for that role. Clearly, the social role of "man" in our culture carries with it particular behaviors, attitudes, characteristics, and occupations. It is easy to generate the "front" one would need to embody to be a "man." As Goffman indicated, it is rather difficult to navigate with an unestablished "front" (p. 27). More likely, we must choose from those already established. Thus, masculine-presenting female-bodied people are read as men, rather than as transgender; they find it impossible to establish a transgender presentation, other than androgynous. This is problematic for those attempting to establish a newly developed front.

"When the individual does move into a new position in society and obtains a new part to perform, he is not likely to be told in full detail how to conduct himself" (p. 72). In other words, most transgender people have not had the "anticipatory socialization" that males get as young boys (p. 72). While this is true, the "front" of man is so readily available in our culture, most transgender people can present a convincing masculine identity.

Goffman further asserted that society is organized on the principle that any individual who possesses certain social characteristics has a moral right to expect others to value and treat "him" in an appropriate way. Moreover, when an individual claims to be some kind of person (and therefore projects a particular definition of the situation), "he" exerts a "moral demand" on the others to oblige him and treat him in that particular way (p. 13). He also forgoes all claims to be things he does not appear to be, and forgoes that appropriate treatment.

Symbolic Interaction

Symbolic interactionism is a particular perspective within social psychology (Blumer, 1969; Mead, 1934) based on three central premises. First, humans act towards things on the basis of the meanings that the things have for them. Secondly, the meaning of things arises out of the social interaction that one has with others. Thirdly, the meaning attached to objects is subject to and modified by an interpretive process used by individuals in dealing with encountered objects (Blumer, 1969). In symbolic interactionism, an object is any thing to which an individual attaches meaning, including the self. The principles of symbolic interactionism contend that an object has social significance only because an individual acts towards it, or designates it with some socially created symbol. Thus, things become significant in a social sense once they are designated as objects by means of symbols. For example, the concept of transgender exists because we give historical and contextual meaning to the symbols "male" and "female." Transgender becomes a symbol representing something other than either of those. The symbols male and female, though the meaning of each is not static, are relatively stable. As the meaning of the symbol "transgender" has not been established on a societal level, the social meaning attached to it is constantly evolving and developing.

Symbolic interaction suggests that part of the interpretive process of social interaction involves the self. Our self becomes an object, and we act toward it just like any other object. So, as individuals act towards themselves, the meaning of their self is constructed and refined and an identity is created and maintained. Cooley's (1902) theory of the "looking glass self" suggests that individuals cannot learn about themselves alone; they need interaction with others in order to imagine themselves through other's eyes. An

individual possesses a self only in relation to the other members of his or her social group, and the structure of the self reflects the structure of the groups in which an individual is a member (Mead, 1934). The influence of the larger community in which one develops a self is therefore not to be underestimated.

Identity can be defined as an individual's sense of location relative to the various groups and categories of people with whom he or she comes into contact (Hewitt, 1994). An individual's identity is formed cumulatively, as he or she moves from one situated identity to another. Symbolic interaction asserts that images an individual has of others may become objects of aspirations as well as standards of judgment, thus linking self-concept to actual conduct (Hewitt, 1994). A social identity refers to a sense of self that is built up over time as the person participates in social life and identifies with others. Its frame of reference is not a particular situation, but encompasses an entire community, the set of real or imagined others with whom a person feels a similarity and common purpose (Hewitt, 1994). Within this research, the categories of man and transgender can be seen as the reference groups to which this sample looks for attributes or qualities to develop within themselves.

Telling Sexual Stories

Drawing on symbolic interaction theory, Plummer (1995) argues that stories are symbolic interactions as well as political processes. Indeed, personal stories often enter the level of public discourse (Denzin, 1992). As stories are "socially produced in social contexts," Plummer (1995, p. 16) argues that stories can offer insight into a culture itself.

Plummer argues that stories have a "motivational plot" (p. 40). For example, gay coming out stories are organized through "implicit biological determinism" (p. 40).

Plummer asserts that these motifs, or motives, are a way for people to explain to themselves and others, who they are, and why they are the way they are. For example, transsexual stories are dominated by a "wrong body" discourse (Stone, 1991).

The narratives of intimate life, including those of gender, are shaped by the settings in which they are presented. Many stories lay dormant, "awaiting their historical moment" (Plummer, 1995). Autobiographical works, beginning with Christine Jorgenson's (1967), have given a voice to transgender—mostly transsexual—experiences (Feinberg, 1993; McCloskey, 1999). However, with few exceptions, it is only in recent years that transgender people (almost exclusively transsexual) have moved from being written about to doing the writing. Stories have their time, Plummer argues, and transgender stories are "stories whose time has come" (Ekins & King, 2001, p. 195).

As Plummer (1995) reminds us, a story does not equal or replace one's life. One story—a moment in time—can never represent one's life, even for a moment. While the story may be "momentarily true," no stories are true for all time and space (p. 170). However, stories are an important tool for understanding individual lives and the wider culture.

Transgender Stories

Plummer (1995, pps. 126-129) argues that there are necessary conditions which must exist in order for a story to "find its time" (p. 126). The acceptance of gender and sexual orientation as socially constructed and fluid, the emergence and prevalence of alternative understandings of transsexuality and transgenderism, and the impact of the mass media and the internet have all contributed to the cultural conditions that have

welcomed transgender stories. Overall, the dominant motif has evolved from pathological to empowered, in individual stories as well as within the cultural discourse.

Our sense of ourselves as gendered beings is an "ongoing composition" (Jackson & Scott, 2001) which requires that we compose ourselves bodily. In this vein, Ekins and King's (2001) study of "transgendering body stories" offers a categorization of bodily changes among transgender people. Acknowledging that the binary sex and gender system makes "transgendering" problematic, they categorize the stories into four categories: migrating, oscillating, erasing, and transcending. By enforcing or supporting traditional gender roles, migrating and oscillating tend to "shore up the divide," while transcending tends to "deconstruct the divide" (p.199). What they call "transcending" is especially useful for this study, as the participants do not change from one sex to another (migrate), nor do they change back and forth (oscillate). They do attempt to live and present a gender "somewhere outside the spaces customarily offered to men and women, as people who are beyond the laws of gender" (p. 197).

Ekins and King note that transcending body stories are becoming "increasingly vociferous, sophisticated, and politically astute" (p. 200). Some common elements among trangendering body stories are that medical authority is questioned, diversity is celebrated, and the certainty of sex and gender is called into question. Those telling transgendering stories tend to reject hormonal and surgical treatments, and tend to be "out" as transgender people, as passing, in their view, supports the binary gender system.

In addition to the body story categories, Ekins and King offer four processes that transgender people use to manage their bodies: substituting, concealing, implying, and redefining. For this study, participants are most likely to conceal (by binding breasts or

wearing baggy clothes), imply (creating a bulge in the pants to signify a penis, i.e. "packing"), and redefine. Redefining can include anything from viewing one's clitoris as a small penis, to redefining one's self as "not-female." Those who redefine do not frame their story in terms or transsexuality or transvestitism. Instead, "the whole process of transgendering is radically redefined by rendering problematic the binary gender divide" (p. 195).

Jackson and Scott (2001) argue that "gendered sexual bodies cannot, and should not, be separated from gendered, sexual, and social selves." How do transgender-identified individuals "announce" their gender through their bodies? How does the relationship with the body affect transgender people's sense of identity? Transgender identity offers an intriguing arena in which to explore the connection between experience(s) of gender and of the body.

As a whole, the historical and more recent theories of sex, gender, and sexual orientation provide the context for a study of how female-bodied people experience a transgender identity situated in the early 21st century. This population may utilize past and present theories of gender identity, consciously, if they have read recent transgender theory, or unconsciously, as they create their own identity theories through experience. While the variety of theories offers perspectives on the "nature" of gender, the data will speak for themselves.

CHAPTER 3

METHOD

Research Design

This study is a phenomenological examination of female-bodied transgender-identified individuals. As the purpose was to understand the lived experiences of this population, qualitative methods, including in-depth interviews, were appropriate. Given the emerging nature of this identity, the personal stories and native interpretations of female-bodied transgender people are central to understanding their experiences (Ekins & King, 2001).

Qualitative Methods

Qualitative methods are most appropriate when one seeks to understand "the nature of persons' experiences with a phenomenon," especially those phenomena about which little is known (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 19). The small size of this population and the goal of understanding the unique lived experiences of individuals within a particular subgroup warrant qualitative methods as the best choice for this study. Further, qualitative methods were preferable to quantitative methods because this is a population whose voices have not yet been heard.

It is through qualitative methods that we can best "discover the participants' experience" (Lofland & Lofland, 1995, p.18). Rather than making broad assessments of an entire community, the purpose is to gain a deeper understanding of individual lives, one accessible only through qualitative methods. Rossman and Rallis (1998) suggest we term such studies "descriptive cultural" studies.

The goal of phenomenological research is to "determine what an experience

means for the persons who have had the experience" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 13). Each of us lives within a social world, and therefore we understand our individual experiences only through social lenses. Through understanding the meanings that an individual has made of a phenomenon, we can best understand the phenomenon itself.

Phenomenology is best used for complex subjects about which little is known. Perception is viewed as "the primary source of knowledge" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 52), and description is seen as the best way to capture experience (p. 58). In conducting phenomenological research, the researcher avoids a priori assumptions about the phenomenon and "enters the field with an open mind" (Lancy, 1993, p. 9). The typical method of collecting data in phenomenological research is the long interview (p. 114), and the goal is an "in-depth understanding of a phenomenon" (Morse, 1994, p. 36). Phenomenological research attempts "to capture the reality of the subjects" (Lancy, 1993, p. 9). Phenomenology is appropriate for studying female-bodied transgendered people, for empirical research on this phenomenon is scant, and understanding of this experience is minimal. This method assumes that people's lived experiences are a source of knowledge. By learning about their experiences, we can develop our own understanding of the experience.

Data Collection

I used two types of interviews for this study: individual phenomenological interviews and an extended focus group interview. Interviews offer researchers access to a population's "ideas, thoughts, and memories in their own words, rather than in the words of the researcher" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 19), and this is essential for a population historically targeted by oppression. Indeed, the goal in each interview was to "envision

the person's experience" (Reinharz, 1992, p. 39). Fine (1983-84) suggests that interviewing can help us understand how people with relatively little social power assert control in their lives.

Individual Interviews

The goal of phenomenological interviewing is "to have the participant restructure his or her experience within the topic under study" (Seidman, 1998, p. 9). Through the use of in-depth interview questions, participants relate their experiences and their understanding of those experiences. While Seidman (1998) advocates the use of three separate interviews with each participant, it was unrealistic to meet with each participant more than once, and I chose instead to utilize one interview session.

Lancy (1993) advises that pre-constructed interview questions are incompatible with phenomenological interviewing. As the goal of this study was to understand how female-bodied individuals understand themselves as transgender, I posed general questions regarding gender presentation, the body, masculinity, sexual orientation, and gender in daily life. By posing fairly general questions, I allowed unanticipated topics to arise. Additionally, participants were invited to raise issues not addressed by the questions.

After a call for participants (see Appendix A), respondents emailed me, and based on my original criteria, I selected individuals to interview. For face-to-face interviews, we set up a time, and met in person at the participant's home, a public place, or in my campus office. For telephone interviews, we scheduled a time to talk, and I mailed out a demographics sheet and consent form ahead of time[5] (see Appendix B) All 23 interviews lasted from one hour, 15 minutes to two and a half hours.

At the beginning of each meeting (face-to-face or phone), I explained the purpose of the interview, and answered questions about the study and interview process. If the interview was face-to-face, I asked the participant to fill out a demographics sheet. I also reminded them that the interview was to be audio-recorded. I relied on an interview guide (see Appendix C) that remained mostly stable throughout all 23 interviews, though after the first few, I rearranged some of the questions. While I informed the participants that there were topics I wanted to cover, I also encouraged them to address other topics as they saw fit.[6]

Most interviews flowed very freely, while a few participants had to be drawn out more overtly. Typically, the participant covered many of the topic areas in their response to the first question, and their answer determined my choice of the next areas to discuss. Due to time limits, I did not ask all questions of all participants. While a few participants had participated in interviews for other purposes, many stated that they never usually participate in "things like this." A number of participants thanked me for doing this work.

I ended most interviews with the request that the participant contact me if s/he thought of anything that had been left out. Except for friendly emails asking how the work was going, I did not hear from participants again. Later, I mailed a copy of the interview transcript to each participant, and again asked for their feedback on the accuracy of their accounts. I also asked each participant if s/he wanted to be informed about the focus groups, and even those who lived across the country expressed interest. Every local person except for one said s/he would be interested in participating.

Focus Group Interview

Focus groups are viewed as particularly helpful for studying issues with "many levels of feelings and experience" (Carey, 1994, p.226). As somewhat of a group interview, a focus group discussion offers a chance for the participants to influence the path of the study, and make connections with each other. In this study, the focus group allowed the group members to establish familiarity with each other, and it fostered a deeper exploration of the issues. Krueger (1988) suggests that focus groups mimic real life by providing "a natural environment in which participants are influencing and influenced by others" (p. 30). This interaction is particularly effective at evoking information about how and why people feel the way that they do (Krueger, 1988; Marshall, 1999). Although individual interviews can also accomplish this, focus groups provide a social interaction much like those that influence our attitudes and opinions. In other words, it is through the exchange of ideas that we are able to articulate our own. This is a particularly effective method for this topic, for many participants found their ideas about this issue difficult to articulate, given the limitations of our language around issues of sexuality and gender identity.

Given that this is a phenomenological study, the focus group questions were fairly broad (see Appendix D). As with the individual interviews, I proposed broad themes for discussion (based on the individual interview data) and let the more specific topics emerge. The themes I proposed in the focus group sessions were: transgender identity, gender attribution, the body, and sexuality. Participants were also encouraged to raise questions of their own.

Initially, I intended to conduct a series of focus groups with people who had participated in the interview process. Once I had conducted the individual interviews however, it became clear that having the same people at each group would be important, and that it would not be feasible for people to commit to three different days. I had interviewed people from all over New England, and I wanted to invite many of them to the focus group. Therefore, I decided that one extended focus group made better sense, and modified the format to two 2-hour sessions in one day. This allowed me to invite non-local people to participate. The group met on a Saturday over the course of five hours with a one-hour lunch break, and took place at the University of Massachusetts GLTB resource center. The group was co-facilitated by myself and a female-bodied transgender-identified person familiar with these issues through experience and theoretical background. This facilitator's contributions to the focus group are utilized as part of the data.

The extended focus group took place four months after the last individual interview, and was intended as a way to follow up on significant points raised during the interviews. I invited 14 of the original participants who had expressed interest to participate, based on the following criteria. First, they had demonstrated a strong ability to express themselves in the individual interview. Secondly, they demonstrated the ability to articulate and make sense of their experiences, to themselves and to me. Thirdly, I attempted to choose a wide range of identities including race, age, and gender, and sexual orientation. I wanted a range of experiences and understanding of transgender identity represented. Ultimately, eight people committed, and six arrived to participate in the focus group (one person had a last minute emergency, and the other did not show up).

Each participant was asked to fill out a demographics sheet, sign a consent form (see Appendix E), and was again informed that the focus group would be audio recorded. I introduced my co-facilitator, who identified herself as female-bodied and transgender. I posted guidelines for the group, and asked members for additions and clarification. As an opening round, the participants were asked to introduce themselves and share what had initially interested them about the project. The group addressed a primary and secondary focus for each session. In addition to addressing topics as they arose, there was time for participants to raise their own questions to the group at the end of each session.

Participants

Recruitment

The United States has the highest number of internet users in the world, and the number of users world wide is expected to reach 1 billion by 2005 (Slevin, 2000). Online list-serves allow people to access virtual communities with those they might not be able to otherwise access (Kollack & Smith, 1999), and is making a tremendous amount of information available to individuals (Slevin, 2000). Further, the World Wide Web (the web) "makes visible interests and activities that were previously hidden or restricted to narrow audiences" (Kollack & Smith, 1999, p. 24). For these reasons, transgender people more than others may be likely to access online list-serves.

Using the web to find research participants is advantageous in numerous ways: a large number of people in a broad geographical area can be accessed quickly, one can target special interest groups and hard to reach populations, the costs of access and travel are minimal, and correspondence via email is easily tracked (Mann & Stewart, 2000). Since I knew gaining access to such a small and hidden population would be challenging,

I utilized the web and sent out an email announcement (see Appendix A) to four on-line list-serves targeting transgender populations, including those that focused specifically on female-bodied populations. My call for participants included permission to forward the announcement to any list deemed appropriate. My announcement was also posted on the local GLTB Community Center website, and I made a verbal announcement about my study at a local transgender community-building conference in April, 2001.

Although I had originally planned to post my call for participants in appropriate places around the state, it soon became unnecessary. Within two months, I received approximately 73 responses to my list-serve announcement. The respondents were from across the United States, and there were a few from Canada, England, and Japan. Though I was overwhelmed with responses, I responded to each one providing more information about the study or asking clarifying questions about their identity. There were a number of people who did not write again, or wrote to say that they did not fit the criteria. A number of respondents initially asked for clarifying information such as "What do you mean by physical changes? Do you mean surgery, or do you include hormones?" or questioned what I meant by "fully transition to male." These responses highlighted the complex nature of this identity, as well as the lack of concise language.

In order to cull the number to a manageable amount, I began eliminating respondents. Due to phone costs, I first ruled out those who lived outside of the United States. With my primary criterion in mind—to talk to people who identified as transgender but did not intend to change their bodies—I next culled out respondents because they were not appropriate for the study (they had already pursued physical changes to their bodies, identified themselves primarily as transsexual, "pre-op," or as

men, or otherwise indicated that they intended to pursue full physical transition). Unfortunately, I had to eliminate several people of color because they stated that they planned to pursue transition, or had already started to change their bodies.

After ruling out unsuitable participants, I then focused on setting up interviews with local (New England) respondents. Once I had conducted about 8 face-to-face interviews, I returned to the emails and contacted people for phone interviews. I chose people based on the information they had provided about their identity in their email response, (i.e. those who overtly stated that they had no plans to transition), and tried to pick a variety of ages and races. However, most people did not indicate their age or race in their initial response, and I did not feel comfortable asking that information without a commitment to interview.

Although I did not interview everyone who volunteered, I did interview people without any further screening. Unfortunately, this resulted in at least three interviews in which the participant seemed to have a different agenda than what was purportedly agreed to via the call for participants (see endnote #2). For that reason, I chose to eliminate three interviews from the final data. Additionally, one of those participants never returned the consent form. There was one other participant who for unknown reasons, never returned the demographics sheet and consent form. That data unfortunately was also eliminated. In the end, I utilized the data of 19 individual participant interviews.

Of the 19 participants, 15 heard about the study via an email or the GLBT center website (See Table 1). The remaining four heard about the study through mutual acquaintances, or from the announcement made at a local transgender conference.

Interestingly, many participants saw the email on a list to which it had not originally been sent (it had been forwarded; see Table 1).

TABLE 1
Source of participant

Response	n (%)
Snowball	2 (11%)
GLBT center website	1 (5%)
UMASS GLTB email	1 (5%)
UMASS Transgender activist list	2 (11%)
List serve email ad	11 (58%)
UMASS Transgender Conference	2 (11%)
Total from list serves	16 (84%)
Other	3 (16%)

List serves
TAN (UMASS Transgender activist network)
Transacademics
Trans-on-campus
Compass (Boston area listserve)
Butch2butch
Amboyz
Transgender-Jews
FTMI

Individual Interview Participants

In many respects, the group of 19 respondents was fairly homogenous. The age range was 20-51, with an average age of 32 (see Table 2). Fourteen (about 73%) of the participants identified themselves as white, while the remaining identified as bi-racial, Native American, or African American. One participant maintained that his race and ethnicity are "unknown" because he is adopted (see Table 3). Most participants identified their ethnic background as mixed such as "Italian-Irish," "German-French," etc. Six left ethnicity blank. For socio-economic status, most identified themselves as middle class

(9), upper-middle (3), or lower-middle (3). Four identified themselves as working class or lower class (See Table 4).

TABLE 2**
Age

Response	n (%)
18-20	2 (11%)
21-30	8 (42%)
31-40	6 (31%)
41-50	2 (11%)
51-60	1 (5%)
Total	19 (100%)

TABLE 3
Race

Response	n (%)
White	14 (74%)
African American	1 (5%)
Native American	1 (5%)
Biracial – Asian & White	1 (5%)
White & Portuguese	1 (5%)
Unknown	1 (5%)
Total	19 (100%)

TABLE 4
Socio-economic Class

Response	n (%)
Upper Middle	3 (16 %)
Middle	8 (42%)
Lower middle	4 (21 %)
Working/lower	4 (21%)
Total	19 (100%)

** All percentages are approximate.

This sample was fairly well educated, with most having at least a 4-year college degree. While seven stated that they had only some college, at least three of those individuals are currently in school. Five participants had advanced degrees (see Table 5). The majority of the participants (18) stated that they had no disabilities important to their identity.

TABLE 5
Education

Response	n (%)
Some college	7 (37 %)
Associate's degree	1 (5%)
Bachelor's degree	6 (32 %)
Master's degree	3 (16 %)
Advanced degree	2 (11%)
Total	19 (100%)

Three participants identified as Jewish, three as Unitarian Universalist, three as Catholic, non-practicing Catholic, or "recovering" Catholic. Seven stated that they did not identify with any religion, and the remaining participants identified their religion as "Spiritual," "Witch," or "Science of mind" (see Table 6).

TABLE 6
Religion

Response	n (%)
Catholic, non-practicing Catholic, Recovering Catholic	3 (16 %)
Jewish	3 (16 %)
Unitarian Universalist	3 (16 %)
No Religion	7 (37 %)
Other	3 (16 %)
Total	19 (100%)

The demographics sheet listed sexual orientation and gender as open-ended questions. Therefore, some participants used more than one identifier for themselves. See Tables 7 and 8 for the list of identities named by these participants. There were numerous instances when the participant asked me what to write, said that they weren't sure what to write, laughed out loud, or made some otherwise notable comment in response to the sexual orientation and gender categories. My response was always the same, "That's why it's open-ended. Put whatever you want."

While seven participants wrote transgender as their gender identity, it is worth noting that 13 other identities were named as well. Some who wrote transgender also wrote other identities. This speaks to the lack of uniformity around identity and language, and to the diversity of identities under the umbrella of transgender identity. While many of these identities are overlapping, some are distinctly different, such as androgynous and transbutch. Further, what one participant meant by writing "both," another might mean by writing "androgynous." And, what one means by writing "trans" might not be the same as what someone else means by the same word.

The occupations ranged from students, teachers, to self-employed consultants and small business owners. Other jobs included human service work, sales, and other professional jobs. There were no patterns of occupation.

Among the sample, eight participants were raised in the suburbs, five were raised in rural areas, and six were raised in small or large cities. Currently, seven live in the suburbs, ten live in small or large cities, and two live in rural areas. It became clear that rural, suburban, and urban is a matter of perspective when people who lived in the same town or city wrote different categories (i.e. one wrote urban, one wrote suburbs).

TABLE 7
Gender Identity

Response	n (%)
Transgender	6 (32 %)
Trans	3 (16 %)
FTM	3 (16 %)
Male/female/ both	3 (16 %)
Androgynous	2 (11%)
Genderqueer	2 (11%)
Male, Male-identified	2 (11%)
Transbutch	1 (5%)
Trannyboy	1 (5%)
Female, male, and other	1 (5%)
FTM transsexual (non-op)	1 (5%)
Masculine/male	1 (5%)
Stonebutch transboy	1 (5%)

TABLE 8
Sexual Orientation

Response	n (%)
Lesbian	3 (16 %)
Queer	4 (21 %)
Gay	3 (16 %)
Bisexual	3 (16 %)
Heterosexual	2 (11%)
Dyke	1 (5%)
Transguy	1 (5%)
Homosexual	1 (5%)
Fag	1 (5%)
Attracted to women/females	1 (5%)
Sexually attracted to femmes	1 (5%)
Not sure	1 (5%)
No label	2 (11%)

Note: As these were open-ended questions, some participants indicated more than one identity. Therefore, totals may add up to more than the number of participants.

Focus Group Participants

As the focus group was four to seven months after the individual interviews, very few identities had changed. The age range of this group was 21-51, average age 34. All

participants are white, and all participants identified as middle or lower middle class. One participant identified that his gender identity was changing from female to male.

Data Management and Analysis

I began this study with the assumption that the data would emerge, and that much of the data would be non-quantifiable. I did not intend to test a theory; rather, I explored the data inductively and allowed the data to "speak for themselves" (Wolcott, 1994, p. 13). My intention was to "describe, analyze, and interpret" in order to "understand and represent" (Rossman & Rallis, 1998, p. 10; Wolcott, 1994), rather than measure and quantify.

The data consist of interview transcriptions and notes, focus group transcription and notes, and memos. To manage the data, I used the qualitative data analysis software program HyperResearch, which assists researchers in coding, organizing, managing, and analyzing links between data. To analyze the data, I heeded Wolcott's (1994) trinity of description, analysis, and interpretation. By beginning with a focus on description, I addressed the general question of "What is going on here?"(Wolcott, 1994), before moving on to analysis and interpretation.

I utilized a variety of methods to analyze the data. Initially, I conducted open coding to begin to manage the data (Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Open coding allows the researcher create general codes in a first pass at the data in order to condense the large amount of data into categories. For example, when a participant discussed efforts to hide his or her breasts, I coded this as "breasts hide." By continually asking, "What are the data saying?" and naming different aspects of the data, I created 129 codes, which in turn produced 129 reports. Based on my original research questions, I examined the data

within each code, and tracked emerging themes through written memos. For example, I examined the chunks of data within the code, "breasts hide" to analyze the ways in which participants go about hiding his or her breasts, the reasons why he or she might do so, and how this relates to his or her transgender identity.

From the 129 codes, I was able to group codes that seemed to relate to one another into 12 broader thematic areas (see Table 9). For example, I grouped together all those codes that related to the body (see Table 10). Many of the codes fell into more than one category. From these 12 thematic areas, I focused on those that most related to my research questions, such as gender attribution and gender presentation.

TABLE 9
Data Themes

Gender Identity
Gender Attribution
Gender Presentation
Body
Sexual Orientation
Process of Coming Out and Understanding the Identity
Managing Gender
Challenges
Masculinity
Education
Community
Catch-all

TABLE 10
Theme #4: Body

body alien
body achieving change
body I like it
body ideal is different
body muscles
body not change, not pass
bottom surgery
breasts hide
health issues
not transsexual
transition limiting
transition yes
transition no
transsexual yes

Eventually, with my research questions and framework in mind, I was able to identify four distinct but overlapping areas of foci. I then wrote memos on what each of these four areas encompassed. With these ideas in mind, I reviewed all the memos and organized the data into the four sections. Relying on axial coding (Strauss & Corbin, 1990), I then reexamined the data within each code and among the codes to analyze the meanings within each broader theme. Axial coding involves a subsequent pass at the data using the codes created from the first round of coding. This type of analysis allows the researcher to search for common themes that highlight meaningful aspects of the data, to suggest relationships among the data, and to offer potential direction for interpretation. Rather than searching for general themes, I began the process of organizing the codes into themes. Through interpretation, the researcher can make meaning beyond the initial analysis, to offer analysis of the broader social meaning suggested by the data. For example, in this stage, I began to consider that the body played a central role in the themes of gender presentation and gender attribution. My analysis and interpretations are

integrated into Chapters Four and Five.

In addition to the more traditional coding methods, I also conducted domain analysis (Spradley, 1980), during which the researcher identifies a cover term, and then relies on a semantic relationship to exhaust all possibilities within the data. Cultural domains are categories of cultural meaning (e.g. tree) that have sub-categories (e.g. pine, elm, palm, etc.). Domain analysis is effective for drawing out the meaning attached to symbols, actions, social situations, or artifacts within a culture or population. This was effective for examining the multiple motives for participants to claim a transgender identity, and how they manage and present that identity. See Table 11 for examples of domain analyses that I explored.

TABLE 11
Examples of Domain Analyses

Semantic Relationships	Cover Terms
Is a path to	transgender identity
Is a kind of	transition
Is an aspect of	gender presentation
Is a reason to	make accommodations or compromise my identity
Is a reason to	use masculine pronouns
Is a reason to	pass
Is a reason not to	pass
Is a reason	I feel masculine
Is a reason	I do not identify as transsexual
Is a way to	come out as transgender
Is a way to	pass
Is a way	being transgender impacts my life
Is a way	I externalize my gender

In a continuing effort to reduce the data, I created five profiles (Seidman, 1998) based on some of the participants. Profiles are effective for "opening up one's interview material to analysis and interpretation" (p. 102). By generating profiles, I was able to utilize the participants' own words within the context of their stories, in order to "reflect their consciousness" (p. 102). Profiles are useful for "reconstructing and finding the compelling in the experiences of everyday life" (p. 105). Though distinct from profiles, narratives are "a story that tells a sequence of events that are significant for the narrator and his or her audience" (Denzin, 1989, p. 37). Narratives describe a mostly linear sequence of events and usually have a beginning, middle, and end. "Personal experience stories" may be part of a longer "personal history" (p. 38). I also attempted to create "thick descriptions" of the participants' experiences, in order to "capture" their interpretations of their experiences (Denzin, 1989). Thick description is necessary for "thick interpretation" which allows the reader to "share vicariously in the experiences" (p. 83). Interpretation gives social meaning to, clarifies and "untangles" the experiences conveyed by the participants (p. 109). Though I conducted some narrative analysis, due to space constraints, the results do not appear in this dissertation.

In sum, after organizing representative descriptive accounts and keeping regular memos of my ongoing thoughts about the data, I identified key themes that underlay the data. Lastly, I interpreted the broader meaning that my analyses offered, in terms of how people experience and present transgender identity.

Limitations

The nature of qualitative research is such that no individual study can position itself as representative of any particular group (Marshall & Rossman, 1999, p. 43).

Likewise, this research does not intend to represent any immutable segment of the transgender community. Identities are mutable, ever changing and often provisional. With the socially constructed limitations of gender identity, makeshift identities are commonplace. Therefore, it is important to note that each interview in this study captures only a moment of each participant's identity. Identities are processes, never stagnant. Thus, while I have analyzed the data that I gathered, much of the data is already dated, and my analysis may no longer feel accurate for the participants. Additionally, the inherent instability of stories makes truly capturing individual identities impossible. We tell different stories to different people, depending on social circumstances, the salience of particular identities during periods of our lives, and how we feel about our lives at that moment.

Though I looked for common characteristics among the participants, it was not to assert these as fixed or distinguishing markers. In fact, rather than characterize this particular population in general, this research simply establishes "a place at the table" in the literature for the study of female-bodied transgender people. In the future, perhaps this research can be seen as a benchmark from which others can work.

This research is necessarily limited by the nature of sampling. Qualitative research is extremely time-consuming, and the size of the sample population is therefore necessarily limited. Additionally, although I have made every effort to obtain a diverse sample population in terms of gender identity, socio-economic status, racial and ethnic background, and other social identities, the small size of this population and of this study constrained the diversity of my sample. Other factors, such as stages of identity development, lack of access to resources, and the risks associated with "coming out" in

this way, also affected access to a truly representative sample population. Though the sample size is limited and therefore cannot be interpreted as representative of the population at large, because there is very little empirical research, and again, none that specifically focuses on non-physically-transitioning female-bodied transgender people, this work is nevertheless essential.

It should be noted that almost all of my participants were recruited through the use of the internet. While there are numerous advantages to finding research participants on the web (Mann & Stewart, 2000), it is a highly selective method. While it is likely that this particular population utilizes this internet more than the average person, many argue that computer access is a class and education related issue (Mann & Stewart, 2000), and there are many people who do not have access to the internet. In 1999, about 30% of the U.S. population had access to the internet (Slevin, 2000). My data then, reflect the biases inherent within an internet-selected sample. The majority of the participants are white, middle-class, and well-educated. The data therefore may not represent an accurate portrayal of the range of transgender identities.

While phone interviews allow for access to a wider range of participants, the data is slightly less reliable. Participants could more easily misrepresent themselves, and the lack of direct and visible contact means that body language and other valuable social cues are lost.

Ethical Issues

With any research, and especially with qualitative research, there are accompanying ethical issues. When people's perceptions and experiences are used as data, researchers must be exceptionally attentive to the risk of taking advantage of people's lives. In order

to minimize taking advantage of this population, I considered the ways that this work will contribute to the transgender community. As a social justice educator, it is my hope that this work will ultimately serve as an educational contribution to the community, though I fully expect that the potential usefulness of this work will unfold over time, and I continue to remain open to suggestions from the participants.

My Role as Researcher

As a non-transgender person, I am in some ways an "outsider," which means that I can never fully understand, from an epistemic standpoint, the experiences of transgender people. Therefore my interpretations of the data have been very carefully and cautiously constructed. With this in mind, I utilized a transgender-identified peer debriefer, who regularly read my work, to confirm my interpretations of the data. This peer debriefer provided another perspective on the data besides my own. A peer debriefer, while useful, cannot stand in for one's own interpretations. Although I drew upon ideas generated from conversations with the peer debriefer, in the end, I relied on my own understanding of the data. My interactions with the debriefer consisted of email interactions, face-to-face conversations, and written feedback.

Although I do not identify as transgender, I am a lesbian and am therefore familiar with the limitations of gender boundaries. Because I am not motivated by the attention of men, I challenge the hegemonic construction of female heterosexuality. My experiences as a member of the queer community motivate me to seek understanding and to create connections between my own and others' gendered experiences. Throughout the research process, I made efforts to be up-front, sensitive, and clear about my intentions for this project.

While it is my hope that this process was an empowering one for the participants, that may not have been the case for everyone. As with any research that concerns issues of identity, there is the risk that for some, this process brought identity issues to the forefront of one's life. For that reason, I on occasion made available the names of local transgender support and social groups to participants.

Ethical Boundaries

There are several steps I took to maintain ethical boundaries. All participants were informed of the purpose of this research and of their right to end participation at any time during the interview or focus group. Audiotapes and the codesheet were kept in a locked file cabinet in my home. All names used in this dissertation are pseudonyms.

Focus group participants had to agree to maintain the confidentiality of the other group members. Ground rules, including confidentiality, were established to provide a "safe" space for every participant. The intention of setting up guidelines and monitoring potential sources of hostility was to maintain that every opinion was a valid one.

Even with pseudonyms, it may be difficult to maintain complete anonymity, as the individuals in this study may have particularly distinguishing characteristics which very much need to be kept in mind when assessing their statements. Therefore, in future writing, it may be possible for local community members to "figure out who is who."

In the next two chapters, I present the data. In chapter four, I present four profiles to introduce some of the participants. In chapter five, I utilize the theme of storytelling to focus on particular themes that emerged from the data.

CHAPTER 4

DATA: PROFILES

Introduction

I gathered a tremendous amount of data for this dissertation. Rather than overwhelm the reader with disembodied themes, I utilize Chapter Four to introduce some of the participants. Rather than tell four individual stories, which would be rather limiting, or twenty-three, which would be impossible, I present a representative profile of each of four groups. These groups do not capture everyone's story, nor do they represent any individual's entire story. They offer instead a sense of some of the different ways these participants think about being transgender (see Table 12).

I rely here on particular themes to guide the profiles. These themes emerged from the data and shaped almost everyone's story in one way or another (see Appendix F for these descriptors). By constructing and focusing in on these themes, I was able to create some groupings of participants based on some of their common characteristics. This does not imply that each group is homogeneous. On the contrary, the complexities and nuances of each story are evident, and the groups have almost as much in common as is different.

Based on the descriptors, I created four profiles: transgender is both; trannyboys, genderqueer, and off that spectrum entirely. These profiles represent some of the ways female-bodied people who identify as transgender but have not changed their bodies think about the identity of transgender. There are overlapping characteristics among the profiles. Excerpts have been edited for clarity (removal of "um," "like," "I mean," etc.). Each profile begins with a general description and is followed by one person's story.

TABLE 12: Dimensions of Transgender Identity

1. Did the participant change their name or not? If yes, was the name distinctly male, or fairly gender-neutral?
2. Which pronouns does this participant prefer?
3. Did the participant identify as a lesbian in the past?
4. What is the participant's current relationship to lesbian identity?
5. Does the participant currently identify as butch?
6. How does the participant ideally want to be perceived by others?

	1. Name Change	**2. Pronouns**	**3. Past Lesbian Identity**	**4. Current Relation-ship to Lesbian Identity**	**5. Butch**	**6. Ideally Perceived**
Sal Transgender is Both	No	Weak preference/ Either	Yes	Some do, Some do not	No	Andro-gynous
Trey Trannyboy	Yes Gender-neutral	Strong Preference/ Masculine	Yes	No	No (1 excep-tion)	Male
Stevie Gender-queer	Yes Gender-neutral	Strong preference/ Gender-neutral	Yes	No	No	Gender-queer/ Boy
Marg Off That Spectrum Entirely	Yes Male (1 excep-tion)	Weak preference/ Masculine	By default	No	No	Male
Ev Non-operative Transsexual	No	Strong preference/ Masculine	By default	No	No	Male
Karen Gender-Blender	No	Strong preference Feminine	Yes	Yes	Yes	Female

Continued on next page

TABLE 12 continued

7. How does the participant feel about his/her body?
8. What is this participant's ideal body?
9. Is the participant interested in or does s/he desire top surgery?
10. Is the participant interested in or does s/he desire bottom surgery?
11. Is the participant interested in or does s/he desire to take hormones?
12. Is the participant considering transitioning? How does s/he feel about transitioning?

	7. Feelings about Body	**8. Ideal body**	**9. Top Surgery**	**10. Bottom Surgery**	**11. Hormones**	**12. Trans-ition**
Sal Transgender is Both	Semi-comfort-able	Inter-sexual	No	No	No	No
Trey Trannyboy	Some discomfort	Male	Yes	No	Low-dose	Unsure
Stevie Gender-queer	Semi-comfort-able	Female	No	No	No	No
Marg Off That Spectrum Entirely	Discomfort	Male	Yes	No	No (or natural hormones)	No
Ev Non-operative Transsexual	Discomfort	Male	No	No	No	Yes
Karen Gender-Blender	Comfort-able	Female	No	No	No	No

Experiencing Gender

Transgender is Both Male and Female

Those whose stories were most strikingly similar were five participants who described feeling like "both female and male." Rather than describing themselves as "a man," "not quite a man," or "not a woman," members of this group described feeling like they had access to both male and female "energy," that they could understand what it felt like to be either. For these participants, this experience feels like a "gift."

Members of this group do not have strong preferences about pronouns or about how they want to be perceived. They have female or gender-neutral names. Passing, or attempting to pass as male is not something they think much about. Some discussed the appeal of androgyny, especially in having an androgynous body.

On the whole, members of this group are mostly comfortable with their bodies, though all "wouldn't mind" if their chest (breasts) was gone. Consequently, four of the five do not expect to pursue any physical changes to their bodies, and one person said that she might pursue top surgery.

Four of the five participants identified as lesbian in the past, and did not mention feeling especially uncomfortable with this identity. Two currently identified themselves as lesbian, one identified as bisexual, and two identified themselves as gay or homosexual.

Unlike others, who recollected their childhood as a time when they became aware of their gender differences, childhood was seldom mentioned, except by Sal, who simply felt limited by her assigned gender role. Sal is white, 37, and middle class.

Sal

"I guess to me transgendered is being both. . . . the way I'm using transgendered is to say, yeah, what you see is a female body but what's inside me is much more than that," Sal explains. She has been thinking about transgender issues for only a couple of years, less than most of the people in this study. Her partner also identifies as transgender, though in a very different way. They have talked about what this could mean for their relationship, and at the time of the interview, Sal was not sure whether they would stay together if one or both of them eventually decides to transition[7].

While growing up, Sal felt restricted by the girl's role expected of her. As Sal was more comfortable wearing baseball caps and comfortable clothes, she had constant battles with her father when he tried to "make her more ladylike." She recalls being put in a dress as a young child, and tucking it into her shorts so it would look like a shirt. She resented her brother for the freedom his role offered, and when no one was around, she would play with his toys and dress up in his clothes. Rather than childhood body discomfort, or any sense of, "I'm not a girl," Sal's focus was the restrictions she felt in the girls' role.

Sal experienced her first lesbian relationship while in college, though she felt like she was "more the boyfriend," and that they "acted like a normal straight couple." As the relationship grew more serious, Sal fantasized about somehow being transformed into a guy, so that she and her girlfriend would be able to get married and have a family. Eventually the relationship broke up, as both Sal and her girlfriend felt that what they were doing was against their religion. The other woman eventually got married, and Sal eventually continued to date women. Sal has never identified as butch. She is attracted to

women, though she wrote "gay" for her sexual orientation. This acknowledges her and her partner's sense of maleness.

Having gone by Sal, a variation on her given name, for a while, she recently experimented with using more masculine-sounding names. None seemed to fit, and after the interview, she changed it to Sam, a more gender-ambiguous name. She has grown increasingly uncomfortable with having to check off "female" on demographics sheets, such as the U.S. Census, and is also increasingly uncomfortable being addressed as "Miss," or "Ms." Neither he nor she feels right, and Sal wishes there were a gender-neutral pronoun in common usage.

Currently, Sal understands her gender identity to be "both." She feels like she has access to both male and female experience, but in some ways feels more like a guy. She feels like she has a genuine understanding of maleness, and describes feeling comfortable talking with men:

> I feel like the gift I have is, I almost know both sexes. I mean, I know definitely what it's like to be a woman. I was raised a woman, so I've been seen as a woman, related to as a woman. But yet there's this whole side of me that's more male oriented, which is what you typically think is male . . . I can relate to guys, I know how to talk to them.

Like many participants, she noted the limitations of our language and our socialization, which causes us to associate particular traits with a gender. Still, she said, "There's really a side of me that's female . . . nurturing, caring, supportive, stuff like that, more compassionate. And then there's also a very strong male side of me too, which is more aggressive, more of a protector type person."

Sal says that she is perceived as female almost all of the time. Occasionally, if she is wearing a baseball cap and someone looks at her quickly, they might say, "Thank you,

sir," but then would correct themselves. This does not bother Sal, as she isn't trying to present in any particular way. She did not discuss passing or any attempts to present as male. She is interested in wearing men's clothes, and would like to be able to shop freely in men's departments. So far, she feels uncomfortable and out of place.

Other than wanting to lose weight, which was mentioned by many of the participants in this study, Sal is mostly comfortable with her body. Like everyone in this group, Sal failed to mention binding[8]. Although she feels that having no chest would be "great," she isn't interested in going through the surgical process, nor would she want the scars she anticipates would occur. She also feels that transitioning into being a guy would not capture her identity, and is concerned that transitioning would alter who she is:

> There's part of me that doesn't want to have to do that [transition] if I don't have to. And I know a lot of people just get to the point where they cannot live any longer as a woman, so they go ahead and they change. And while it would be interesting to be in that body, and change, there's part of me that just doesn't want to change who I am.

Still, if Sal had her way, she would be able to grow facial hair, and would have a stronger, more muscular body. Ideally, Sal would love to have a body that changed back and forth, like a chameleon.

Since she perceives being in the middle as a "great gift," she wishes there was more room for people like her, "I just happen to be very much in the middle, probably more towards the guy. But I'm very much there in that center part. And there doesn't seem to be a place for us, in that center part."

Trannyboys

A second group that emerged from the data is the "transboys," or "trannyboys." Two participants explicitly named themselves as transboys, and several others shared

similar characteristics and attitudes. An identifying feature of this group is age, as all of these participants are under 25. Additionally, these participants appear even younger than they are, often being mistaken for 12 year-old boys. Several "trannyboys" mentioned that they felt like they had not yet grown into their adult self—as a transgender person. Because they have not been "out" or identified as transgender or as male for very long, they did not quite feel like "men" yet. It was difficult for them to explain when they would "grow up," however. Being a trannyboy seems to be an identity not solely defined by age however; it is also a playful way of expressing one's boyish gender. The participants explained their masculinity as characterized by "rough and tumble" play, "wrestling" with other "boys,," and being "scrappy."

Members of this group all had gender-neutral but male sounding names such as Alex. In other words, their names are not strongly male, but if one were to guess, one would guess male. They very much prefer male pronouns, which "fit" better and feel more comfortable. These participants think about passing, and take regular note of how they are addressed by strangers. All dress strictly in boys' clothing, including socks and underwear. All bind their breasts regularly as part of their efforts to avoid being seen as women.

Each of these participants has felt body discomfort since childhood, and puberty was especially difficult. The members of this group all mentioned feeling "like a boy" as a child, and being "surprised" or otherwise frustrated with having to conform to a girl's role, especially as they got older.

These individuals identify as male. They would prefer a male body, though they have not yet pursued any changes because they do not feel "ready." They are especially

uncomfortable with their breasts, and two said they would like to have surgery "like, yesterday." All expect to eventually have top surgery, and most likely go on low dose hormones. This group differs significantly from traditional female-to-male transsexuals because these participants want to retain the identity of transgender, even if they eventually transition. Being transgender is an important and meaningful identity, one that won't diminish, in their estimation, if and when they decide to change their bodies and are able to pass full time if they choose to.

Two of these participants identify as bisexual, and one identifies as being "strongly attracted to femmes." Though one of these participants identifies as butch, he distinguished between being a butch lesbian, which he is not, and his identity, "I'm a butch, but I'm also a boy."

Three participants expressed an affiliation with a closely related identity, "trannyfag," though the identity meant slightly different things to each participant. Overall though, being a trannyfag involves a sense of style, especially in clothing, and is also about how one expresses masculinity and femininity. Alex explained that his masculinity was necessarily feminized, having been raised as a girl, so he made sense of himself as a "femmey guy." Wynn explained simply that there are different kinds of masculinity and his expression of it was somewhat effeminate, which he labeled as trannyfag.

Trey

I don't really feel like a man . . . I don't know if that's because I'm young . . . I haven't been in the trans world that long, so as male I'm young as a guy and I'm still learning about being a guy, or being socialized as a guy and so I feel like a boy, I don't feel like a man (Trey, white college student, age 20).

Trey identifies as transgender, a stone butch, and a transboy. As a young person, Trey considered himself "one of the guys" until high school, when that became less socially acceptable. Trey was close to his father and they participated in many stereotypically male activities together, such as fishing. Puberty, Trey said, really threw him off, as he thought he'd had things "figured out." However, Trey expressed that he never felt limited in being a girl, and never expected that sexism would be anything he couldn't overcome. For Trey, part of being transgender is acknowledging that he was raised as a girl. He explains:

> I know a lot of people who are like, "I am a boy" and [they] don't even acknowledge a female part of themselves, which is cool and fine—there's nothing wrong with that. But to me, I don't wish that I was born a boy, because I think that I have a great experience and being transgendered is something that I'm proud of and I think that it's just part of my story. And it makes me who I am.

Upon entering college, Trey entered his first lesbian relationship. Coming out as a lesbian helped explain his identity for a while, and being identified as a lesbian allowed him the freedom to explore his gender expression:

> As soon as I came out as a lesbian, it was an excuse to cut my hair short and wear boys' clothes all the time and I could play it off as, oh, I'm a dyke and that's what dykes do.

Trey eventually began exploring his identity as a stone butch, which he views as involving "emotional toughness." His butch identity, he explained, is mostly in relationship to femmes—how he interacts with them on an emotional and sexual level. Trey has learned a lot about butch-femme dynamics by reading books such as *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg, 1993), *S/He* (Pratt, 1995) and other works that address traditional butch-femme relationships.

Trey became familiar with transgender issues through a gender workshop at a conference, and while he was collecting information for a resource guide for GLBT youth in his state. As he explored the internet, he came across many web pages of transgender-identified young people. The more he read, the more things began to make sense to him; he felt like he'd discovered a language for his identity. As he explained, "As soon as you learn, like if you identify with it, and if it hits home for you, then you can't go back after that." As he began exploring what this identity meant to him, he developed a community of people (via the internet) he considers his "brothers." He feels a close connection with others who share some of his experiences, and considers them family. Currently, he volunteers for a local Speaker's Bureau and enjoys educating people about transgender identity.

Trey describes himself as strongly attracted to "femmes," and notes that he has even had a crush on a male-to-female transgender friend who is a "high femme." He would not want to date a straight girl, as being queer is important to him, and he would not want to be with someone who was ashamed of their relationship.

Trey has been sure since early in his transgender identity that he wants to have top surgery. At the time of the interview, having bottom surgery was not important to Trey, because he did not feel that "that part has a whole lot to do with who I am," and because he can please his partner for "forty bucks instead of $4,000." Trey binds on a daily basis, even when he is home "watching cartoons in his pajamas." Though he knows no one will know if he's wearing boys' underwear and socks, he does so because it gives him confidence.

Trey discussed feeling "a lot" of pressure from the transgender community to transition, but feels confident that taking time to figure out exactly what is right for him is important. At the same time, he envies his friends who have begun taking "T[9]" and have developed facial hair, a lower voice, and a more muscular frame.

Trey doesn't worry about "acting masculine" because he's "always been really masculine anyway." However, he expresses that he has been more comfortable expressing his masculinity since coming out as trans:

> I think pretty much the degree of masculinity that I have is a pretty intrinsic thing. Like, it's been there, and coming out as trans, it's more okay for me to express it . . . I don't feel like I can't express more feminine traits. But I'm a lot more comfortable expressing the masculine ones . . . like independence and confidence and arrogance and taking up a lot of space when you sit.

In addition to being an "intrinsic thing," being masculine for Trey is closely connected to behavior, such as "joking around with the guys," "roughhousing," and "throwing a football around, and bumping into friends." Enjoying these types of behavior feels central to why he identifies as transgender.

Trey articulated the contradiction of wanting to pass, which feels exciting, and wanting to be recognized as transgender. Depending on the context (large city or small town), Trey passes somewhat often. He says he is just "being himself," and that passing is a "side effect," one which makes him "really happy." In contrast, being read as a lesbian is really "upsetting" for him, because he does not identify as a lesbian at all. He notes that as a butch, he is often misperceived as a butch lesbian in cities and gay-savvy environments.

Being recognized is a strong theme in Trey's story. He worries that if he goes on testosterone, he will no longer be recognized as "queer." The invisibility involved in

passing full time is one factor affecting Trey's feelings about transitioning. While he thinks about it quite often, and feels he probably will eventually transition, he also doesn't want to lose his transgender identity. Being transgender is something he is "proud of," and it is important for him that that identity is recognized.

Overall, Trey is highly cognizant of the fluidity of his feelings about his identity, at the same time asserting that he definitely feels male, and expects he always will. However, since his feelings about his identity have shifted in ways that he wouldn't have expected, he hesitates to predict the future. Of some things he is certain however—as he states, "I'm doing this for me, I'm not doing it for anyone else."

Genderqueer

As it is an umbrella term, one that is newly evolving and claimed by more and more people—especially young people—there are a variety of identities and experiences that fall into the category of genderqueer (Nestle, Howell, & Wilchins, 2002). In this study, three participants (all under age 25) explicitly claimed this identity as a way of identifying as transgender, but one in particular claimed genderqueer as hir[10] primary identity. The other two claimed genderqueer among many identities, including "boy" and transgender. Genderqueer captures a variety of identities and the identity has permeable boundaries. A year after his initial interview, Ezra says he now identifies as genderqueer, but feels uncomfortable letting the trans community know that. He feels that the larger transgender community perceives genderqueer as "young," and not as a valid identity for someone over thirty like himself. As an umbrella term, this category encompasses or overlaps with many of the other categories. As Alex said, "Genderqueer is more inclusive than just trans. Because you can be genderqueer and identify as a butch dyke."

Genderqueer is characterized by the desire to challenge gender roles and presentation, and to "play" with gender. Changing society's attitudes towards gender is the goal; it is in many ways a political identity. But, as Stevi states, "By changing society, maybe I will be cozier in it." Stevi is white, 20, and a recent college graduate.

Stevi

Stevi came to the interview in a T-shirt that said "Fuckgender" on one side and "Genderfuck" on the other. The genderqueer attitude, according to Stevi is, "If there are gonna be gender categories to begin with, might as well have fun with them, rather than being forced into one." In explaining the identity of genderqueer, Stevi explained that it was part of the "world of transgender," and zi[11] connected the identity with not only a rejection of gender labels, but also sexual orientation labels. Genderqueer is about making the categories of gender irrelevant. Stevi explains:

> Genderqueer is something like third gender. It's like, I'm not a boy, and I'm not a girl and neither of those is really accurate. It might be accurate to say that I'm a little bit of both. But, I mean, by dividing the world into girls and boys, what if there are traits that aren't in either category, you know? So, maybe I'm a little bit of both, maybe I'm a little bit of neither.

Stevi chose hir name because it is gender-neutral, but implies maleness. It captures the gender-neutral essence zi wants to present. Stevi prefers using gender-neutral pronouns, though accepts being "she'ed" in public without correction. Among hir friends, who mostly identify as transgender and/or genderqueer, zi and hir are used commonly.

In high school, while identifying as lesbian while also dating boys, Stevi came to the conclusion that labels weren't really relevant to hir life. Upon arriving at college, Stevi realized zi was "drawn" to transgender politics, and eventually chose to claim the identity of transgender. Zi explains, "The whole queer politics thing, for me, was not at

all about who I was attracted to, it was more about, gender shouldn't be a relevant issue in my life." Zi distinguishes hir identity from other transgender-identified people who claim the identity of "boy," which zi does not.

Stevi dresses daily in gender-neutral or "boyish" clothes. While a particular gendered appearance is not all that important to hir, Stevi knows that presentation determines gender attribution. Though zi would prefer to dress "gender-neutral," Stevi instead dresses like a "boy" to "override" hir physical appearance. Otherwise, Stevi says, zi is perceived as a girl. Stevi explains how zi would like to be seen, "If they're not gonna get genderqueer, I'd rather it was boy sometimes." Stevi definitely does not want to be seen as female, mostly because the expectations that accompany the female role feel limiting. Therefore, zi dresses more on the male side than zi really prefers.

By presenting in a more gender-neutral or ambiguous way, both in appearance and by using a gender-neutral name, Stevi hopes that people's understanding of traditional gender roles will be challenged and that they will not make limiting assumptions about hir. Stevi loves that people cannot make any assumptions about hir, indeed that is the point.

Stevi no longer identifies as a lesbian but as queer, and says zi is more attracted to people who "grew up female." Stevi notes that hir own expressions of masculinity and femininity change in relationship to who she is partnered with. Zi has recently dated "trannyboys."

In everyday interactions, Stevi does not care to take the time to explain how zi thinks about gender, and conveys that "It's inconvenient to not have a gender identity that

I can explain in one or two words." With people zi will be spending time with, Stevi takes the time to have a long conversation about what gender means to hir.

Stevi has no desire to change hir body, and feels comfortable in it. Changing hir body would "not feel true" to hir, and would reinforce the notion that particular traits are supposed to go with particular bodies. If zi changed hir body, Stevi would feel like zi was doing it for other people's comfort. Zi explains, "Changing my body to conform to other people's ideas of what body my gender ought to go with, it's definitely not where I want to go ideologically."

Ideally there would be no gender, in Stevi's opinion. But since that isn't a possibility, given our extremely gendered world, it's "better to be confusing about gender. Better at least to have people have to think, before they assign me a gender."

Off That Spectrum Entirely

Whereas members of the "both" and "trannyboy" groups rely on a gender binary to explain their gender, members of this group attempted to define their identity as outside the frameworks we traditionally use to understand gender. Ekins and King (2001) might call these individuals' stories "transcending" gender stories. Unlike those who feel transgender is "both," members of this group find androgyny and ambiguity unappealing, or just too difficult

For these participants, enacting their maleness is just a matter of being themselves. All are perceived as men, as each has a more "male" physical presentation (facial hair, square face). At the same time, they don't necessarily define their identity as simply male or man. Their understanding of their gender sometimes includes being male, but also falls outside our traditional notions of that category. For example, Marg

identifies as a "transguy," rather than a "transman," because he feels that guy is less culturally defined than man. None of these participants identifies as butch, though others have often labeled them that way because of their masculine presentation. These participants enjoy tasks and hobbies traditionally viewed as feminine, as well as those deemed masculine. Members of this group prefer male pronouns and have male names, with one exception—he has chosen to keep his female name, as it simply "feels like his name." Thus, he's a guy named Marg.

Marg is the only person in the entire sample who has had top surgery[12]. He did so because he wanted his body to reflect the image he had in his head of what he wanted to look like. He also takes natural masculinizing hormones. Grady had top surgery about six months after his interview, and works out regularly in order to shape his body to be more male. Because he passes effortlessly, Nathan feels no need to change his body, though he binds daily. Nathan may feel less of a need to present a male body, as his facial hair is convincingly male. While passing was not discussed as extremely important, these participants all pass fairly easily.

All had identified as lesbians before identifying as transgender, but none felt especially comfortable in the lesbian community or identity. It was a default identity; one they felt obligated to take since they were attracted to women (Cromwell, 1999). Currently, two date heterosexual identified women, and the third has a female-bodied transgender partner.

Marg

My identity isn't, it's not man or woman or in between. It's off that spectrum entirely. . . . it's something other than what we have clearly defined in our society.
(Marg, 30, middle class[13])

From early on, Marg says, everyone was telling him that he was a girl, but he knew that his gender did not fit the options that were presented to him. He explains that in kindergarten, "It was clear to me that the options of boy/girl man/woman just didn't fit. But of course, in the early 70s, I had no language to describe that." In elementary school, Marg identified as a tomboy, but only because it felt like the closest thing he could find to his identity.

In college, Marg fell in love with a heterosexual woman, and their relationship was a "very woman-man type dichotomy." Though Marg identified as a lesbian because he "didn't see any other choice," the identity never felt right. Other people labeled him as butch, though he did not feel an affinity for that identity either. It "didn't feel any more or less comfortable than being called a woman." In his early twenties, upon talking with a friend who had recently come out as transgender, things clicked. He explains:

> The second I had language, it all made sense. Everything from being able to label it, which helps a lot, to knowing that there were other people who didn't buy into this dichotomy of [being] either a man or a woman. . . . I finally had that point of "Aha," and came out as a transgender guy.

Currently, Marg thinks of transgender as transcending gender, rather than traveling between two genders. He does not identify as transsexual, which he perceives as traveling from one sex to another. Because of the lack of commonly used gender-neutral pronouns, and because he understands that he presents as what is perceived as masculine, Marg uses male pronouns. He has kept his female name however, because for him it feels genderless. He explains, "It's an identity that I've grown into, that for me isn't associated with a gender." Professionally, he uses the appellation, "Mr. Marg." While Marg identifies as part of the queer community, he is not currently involved with the

transgender community. Rather than being focused around gender and sexual orientation, Marg's life is religiously oriented, and he spends his time with his church community.

Marg shaves his head almost to the scalp, but says that he does this as part of his spirituality; it reminds him that there are many distractions in life. When he first came out as transgender, Marg tried to have a "tough guy look," and worried a lot about how he walked. Eventually, his friends convinced him that he looked silly, and that his usual walk was masculine enough. Marg also began consciously lowering his voice, and he has continued to do so, but feels that he does so more naturally now than consciously.

Because he was attracted to women, Marg at first identified as a lesbian. Once he came out as a transguy, he identified as "straight." Identifying as straight was "fun" because it "messed with people's heads." When he fell in love with another female-bodied transgender-identified person, Marg realized that there were no sexual orientation labels for him. Gay does not work because neither he nor his partner identifies as a man. Currently, he says that a modern definition of bisexual, which "implies that you're attracted to more than one gender" works for him. Marg and his partner planned to be married a few months after the interview. Marg hoped to change his legal sex so that they could get married legally.

Marg has experienced harassment for being transgender, and takes precautions to prevent it. Passing is important to Marg only because it makes his life easier; otherwise, he says he doesn't think too much about it. For example, he is a careful driver; he wants to avoid police interactions which would involve showing his license, which indicates a female sex. Marg began using men's restrooms after regularly being kicked out of women's restrooms. Other than "watching his back," Marg says that being transgender

does not affect his daily life all that much. On the other hand, he says that he sometimes makes an effort not to pass in order to educate people about transgender identity. If someone asks him directly, he says, he always acknowledges being transgender.

Marg is adamant that in being transgender, he is simply expressing himself as he feels to be. He is not trying to present a particular gender, just himself. He explains:

> Coming out as a transguy was definitely a transition point from being closeted to not being closeted. I never transitioned from one gender to another. I haven't, I mean, my gender presentation hasn't really changed all that much throughout my life.

Marg asserts that he does not think about gender presentation, but about how he presents himself. Though Marg buys men's clothing, "It's not so much about gender, it's what I find comfortable for clothing." Having top surgery, he says, was about wanting to "feel more confident in my clothing."

As the only participant in this study who has had top surgery, Marg explains that it was a difficult decision. After many years of being adamantly sure that he would never have top surgery, due to other changes in his life, he eventually felt less rigid about the idea. Marg explains, "The image I have in my head of what I want to look like, from the waist up involves not having breasts. And so the best way to do that was to do top surgery." At the same time, he differentiates his desire to attain a body that felt right for him, and the pursuit of a distinctively male body:

> For me, I don't have a prescribed body image for the gender that I am. Other than the physical body that I've allowed myself to create. Which for me, did include top surgery, and having that made me feel like my body is finally whole.

Marg also takes a natural masculinizing hormone. He has no interest in bottom surgery, as that "seems more about sex, sexual function, and [that is] something that I'm just not connected to."

Marg says that currently, his gender is exactly what he wants to it be. Ideally, Marg says, we'd be able to pick our own gender, and there would be no assumptions about anyone. In other words, there would be no gender attribution.

Other Identities

In addition to being "both," "trannyboys," "genderqueer," or "off that spectrum entirely," there are also individuals for whom none of these groupings fit. With a larger sample, these might also be groups.

Non-operative Transsexual

There were only a few participants whose story echoed the traditional transsexual story. However, though they shared some characteristics, their stories also varied from those uniform stories. Some similarities included Alex stating, "I am definitely a boy; I've always wanted to be a boy," and Ev stating, "I've always had that identity of being a boy and then a man, living with a female body. . . . that is transsexual." Some might argue that Stephanie's statement is that of a non-operative transsexual, "It's being, feeling mostly I feel I'm male, but I'm in a female body."

While there were some similarities to transsexual stories, these participants seemed to make sense of their story in a different way. Grady shared that although "ideally" he would like to be a straight guy, he feels he can't:

> I know a lot of transmen do live as straight guys and no one necessarily knows except their wife that they're trans. But, internally, I feel like I can't ever actually. I mean, I'm not. I mean, biologically, I'm female. . . . so that does make me trans. And I will always be that, because there's no way around that.

So, while most of the participants in this study were transgender by choice; that is, they consciously reject a transsexual identity, some feel "stuck" with a transgender identity

simply because they cannot escape the fact that they were born with a female body, and in their minds, that precludes being a "true" straight man.

Ev identified strongly as a non-operative transsexual. He was very clear that he was a "straight man living in a female body." Ev, white and 51, stated that he always has a sense of himself as a man, even when alone. His consciousness, he feels, is "just like any other straight man's." Although he identifies as a "classic transsexual," Ev chooses to keep his female body for health and spiritual reasons. He is reminded that he is a transman only by his physical body. In essence, a major reason that Ev identifies as transgender is because he is a straight man living in a female body.

Ev uses a gender-neutral name, and prefers male pronouns. He attempts to pass in the world as a man by wearing men's clothing, and acting like a man. Acknowledging that there are many types of masculinity, Ev says his is a "heterosexual" style, which involves "dominance," and "a fair amount of control, taking charge, [a] leadership type." Ev attributes some of his traditional ideas about gender to his age, noting that if he was younger, he might think differently. When he was growing up, straight man and straight woman were the only choices.

Ev binds his breasts, and ideally would prefer a male body. However, he believes that his body is given by his "creator" and he should honor that. Further, he is proud to be transgender, and sees it as a valid identity, one that doesn't need a "solution" like sexual reassignment surgery. Further, changing his body "wouldn't change the fact that I'm a transman." Ev also believes that he has

> a lesson to teach to the world. That it's okay that I'm a man living in a female body, that there's many of us. And it's okay if there's a woman living inside a male body. The answer is not necessarily to change the body, in my view. It's to enlighten society.

At the same time, Ev says he'd be the first in line if there were an all-natural pill to magically transform his body to be male. While he would still embrace his transgender identity, he would be seen as a man and not questioned, and he could choose with whom to share that identity.

Gender Blender

Devor's (1989) study of what she termed "gender blenders," presented women who embodied masculine traits and who were often attributed a male identity. These are women who, because of their physical appearance (big bones, facial hair, low voice, hairstyle, and muscular frame), and because of their gender role presentation (confidence and the way they move), pass for men. Though they sometimes enjoyed passing as men because it gave them a sense of the respect and privilege men possess, their ability to pass was mostly unintentional. To cope with the daily emotional and psychic energy involved in deciding whether to bother correcting someone or not, the women redefined the problem as others'. Rather than identifying as men, the women felt themselves to be women, and that the definitions of femininity should expand to include them. They were not willing to change themselves any further to fit into the gender box; in fact, they felt they would have to undertake extreme forms of femininity in order to be taken seriously as feminine. This study took place before the concept of transgender was widely known. It seems likely that some of the women would have claimed a transgender identity, if it had been available to them.

One person in this study is very much like the sample described in Devor's. Karen is a masculine-presenting woman who identifies as transgender, a woman, and a lesbian. Her attitude is—yes, she is a woman, and that "woman" needs to expand to include her.

She is comfortable with female pronouns and prefers to be seen as female. She likes the fact that her name is feminine because it challenges people's assumptions about gender presentation. She identifies as butch, but initially did so only because other people labeled her that way. She has now reclaimed that identity and made it her own.

Karen claimed a transgender identity because of her experiences of being attributed a masculine gender. She does not feel like, or want to be a man. Her masculine presentation has been a source of difficulty for Karen in many areas of her life, including employment and in daily interactions. Karen is the only participant in this study who is entirely comfortable and happy with her body.

Like Devor's participants, Karen has developed coping mechanisms to deal with the everyday experience of being attributed a masculine gender. She says that she often makes being "misgendered" into an opportunity to educate people about different types of women.

Discussion

An umbrella term such as transgender necessarily implies a range of experiences and understandings of the identity, and these stories communicate the variety and complexity that exist among transgender identities. Moreover, they challenge the stereotype of female-to-male transgender people as homogeneous, androgynous, heterosexual, and obsessed with having a penis (Cromwell, 1998). The range of stories demonstrates the complexity possible in gender identity.

For many of these participants, there has been no endpoint to their gender process. Many have come to conclude that they might never feel settled in a gender identity, other than the catch-all of transgender. After a long process of self-discovery, including a

period of time when she thought she would transition, River said, "I came to understand [that] transgender for me was to be able to give my—create the space in my life to live in the question of gender."

Clearly, there are some commonalities among the participants. For example, each of the participants has struggled with body acceptance in one way or another, and most initially identified as lesbian. Clearly, the areas of gender expression, presentation, and attribution, and the relationship of those to the body are a central theme that all of the participants employ in their explanations of their identity. The "looking-glass self" (Cooley, 1902) has evidently played an important role for most of the participants, as they rely on and give credit to the reactions of others as reflections of the self.

But experiences of gender and its connection with sexual orientation are rarely neat and tidy, especially for transgender-identified people. Though there are commonalities, the prevailing theme among and within the stories presented here is contradiction. There are inconsistencies within individual stories, as well as among the different groupings, and among all of the different understandings of transgender experience. Some participants recognized the challenges within their stories. For example, Trey and Wynn each struggled with the contradiction between wanting to pass as a man, and be recognized as transgender. Ev discussed both his desire for a male body, and his view that his transgender identity is valid and does not need a "solution" like SRS. Some participants seemed to view themselves as unaffected by the hegemony of gender, as Marg did when he explained that he does not think about gender presentation, but about how he presents himself.

The seeming contradictions and inconsistencies among and within the stories support the idea that gender is evolving, fluid, and unpredictable. The ephemeral construction and experience of gender makes it especially challenging to name any concrete understanding of it. Especially for these participants, gender is a process—a work in progress—and attempts to concretize or categorize it unceasingly fail. Thus, while these groupings give some order to the participants' experiences, they should be understood as moments, rather than complete stories. The lack of uniformity among these transgender stories is hopeful; a singular dominant discourse has not yet entrenched itself in these communities.

Dialogue about gender is rife with references to "masculine," "feminine," "man," and "woman," and these participants are no exception. The concept of transgender identities relies on "hegemonic structures of power and knowledge" (Guess, 1997) for definition. In other words, we rely on the standard definitions of gender in order to reject them. Thus, it was extremely challenging, if not impossible for these participants to discuss their identities without relying on traditional ideas of masculinity and femininity, man and woman. Describing one's self as "both" necessarily draws from traditional categories of gender. Even those who described themselves as "off that spectrum entirely" relied on a rejection of the binary to articulate the experience. Guess (1997) argues that identity is "dependent on the very institutions and selves to which it sets itself in opposition" (p. 157). The concept of transgender is dependent on the binary, but individuals have used this identity as a place to start the dialogue.

In this chapter I have presented representative profiles of some of the ways in which female-bodied transgender-identified people think about their gender. These

stories demonstrate the range of experiences and understandings that exist within this small sample. In the next chapter, utilizing Plummer's (1995) concept of storytelling, I focus on the ways these participants realize, find, create, and convey their own transgender stories.

CHAPTER 5

DATA: STORIES

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I conveyed representative transgender profiles and attempted to give a fuller picture of the individual experiences of some of the participants. By highlighting the diversity as well as the commonalities, I emphasized the common elements in the profiles shared by female-bodied transgender-identified people. In this chapter, I examine the "motifs" and meanings inherent in the transgender stories by focusing on how female-bodied transgender-identified people have been affected by and have responded to a few particularly dominant stories. Using Plummer's (1995) storytelling approach, I describe how the participants have challenged these stories and established their own in contrast to them. I examine how the stories reveal the process by which the participants learned about themselves as transgender-identified people and how they created meaning for themselves in that identity.

Stories are not random; they are "patterned, sequenced, formalised, [and] given shape through the organizational frame of the settings in which they are generated" (Plummer, 1995, p. 35). Plummer argues that telling our stories is a major way of "discovering who one really is" and is a "voyage to explore the self" (p. 34). As the cultural tools available for telling transgender stories are few, doing so is perhaps not "confessional," as Arlene Stein (1997, p. 68) asserts about gay and lesbian coming out stories, as much as an avenue of discovery. Stein argues that lesbians rely on identifying with existing available accounts in order to construct their stories. Transgender people who do not identify with the dominant binary stories cannot make use of public stories to construct their own.

Transgender stories then, are composed in response to the dominant stories available in our culture. A rejection or adaptation of existing identities is pursued in the search for what feels meaningful.

As Stein (1997) and others have noted, we learn the most, not from the individuality of people's stories, but from the structures and themes among the stories. Though each person's narrative is unique, there are common themes among the stories of any group. For example, Plummer (1995) demonstrates that gay and lesbian coming out stories are characterized by causal language, linear progression of identity development, a "crucial moment," and a feeling of discovering a "truth" (p. 83). With this in mind, I examined the common themes among these female-bodied transgender stories. These organizing themes, as defined in the introduction in chapter one, provide cohesion to the stories, drawing some parallels among the different narratives. The interdependent themes include: masculinity; the body; sexual orientation and attraction; gender attribution; gender presentation; and feelings about transitioning.

As identities are situated within a historical and social context, these stories were shaped by particular social conditions. For example, these participants' stories are necessarily constructed in response to the gender binary. While the participants struggle to define a self outside the binary, they are simultaneously limited by the possibilities provided by it. This dynamic is complicated by the limitations of language and by the cultural conflation of sex, gender, and sexual orientation. Naming one's self becomes not only confusing, but an act impossibly connected to the binary. Transgender, in some ways, offers a category that skirts the perimeter of the binary. At the same time, the

limitations of language and of our cultural abilities to think beyond the parameters of the binary constrain the possibilities of identity.

Modernist stories, argues Plummer (1995), are not necessarily linear or uniform, but instead take multiple shapes and forms. From the diversity arising from these stories, it becomes evident that the current social conditions have allowed the development of a range of stories divergent from the gender binary. The unsettled state of the stories and of transgender identity makes it challenging to capture these narratives, and in some ways makes it impossible to make generalizations or longstanding interpretations. However, this study is of situated identities, and is not intended to represent any immutable social meaning of transgender identity.

Symbolic interaction is especially useful here, as it is through interaction that we make meaning of ourselves and of our identities. These participants relied in many ways on the interactive process of gender attribution to understand and establish a sense of self. For example, Grady centralized his interactions with other people and their attributions of him to his process of self-discovery. He said of attribution, "I use that as a way of getting used to it [being one of the guys]." Karen in part claimed the identity of butch because everyone else labeled her that way. She said, "When I look at me, I don't see male at all. But clearly it's there [for other people]." By negotiating and interpreting meaning in every interaction, the participants defined and redefined their gender, often based on their own presentation and what they presumed were the interpretations of others. Using the motifs named above, I examine how these participants explain "what is going on, who one is, [and] why one is the way one is" (Plummer, 1995, p. 39).

This chapter is organized into four sections, 1) Transgender Stories: Realizing, Responding, Reacting; 2) Finding Stories; 3) Creating Stories; and 4) Conveying Stories. Though stories are not necessarily linear, many participants experienced a process of realizing and responding to the dominant stories, finding out about alternative stories, and creating their own stories. Though their stories are not static, the participants nevertheless pursue methods of conveying their identities to the external world.

Transgender Stories: Realizing, Responding, Reacting

Up until the 1970s, when the distinction between sex and gender gained greater attention than ever before, the dominant story regarding sex and gender was one of congruency—a male body equaled boy/man, a female body equaled girl/woman. Though there have always been people with differing narratives, this was for years the sole audible story. To some extent, the participants in this study each responded to the dominant stories of girl/woman and boy/man that accompany this expected congruency.

Sexual orientation is linked closely with gender, and each participant initially identified as a lesbian. In doing so, each was compelled to identify with—or reject—the dominant cultural identities of the community: lesbian and butch.

In 1953, male-to-female transsexual Christine Jorgenson's return from Denmark presented another narrative, one that dominated stories of gender variance for nearly the rest of the century. These days, even children are familiar with the concept of transsexual, as television talk shows have sensationalized transsexual experiences. The disease model of transsexuality, with clear motifs of essentiality, lifelong body dissatisfaction and heterosexuality, became an understandable, if not acceptable, story palatable to the general public. Given its prevalence, the most dominant story for transgender people is

transsexuality. Indeed, this story is so established that it is almost impossible to think about transgressing gender without considering transsexuality.

The participants who found a transgender community also encountered particular expectations of female-to-male (FTM) transgenders. The participants again were compelled to regard these stories and construct their identities in response to them.

Overall, in order to discover and articulate their own story, each participant first had to respond to the available dominant narratives. These include girl, lesbian, butch, transsexual, man, and FTM. Only by first responding to these established accounts were the participants able to construct an understanding of their own narrative. The stories are presented in the order each participant most commonly encountered them.

The Dominant Stories

Girl

Harrison (1996) notes that many FTM transsexuals have early memories of wanting to be a boy, along with an awareness of the accompanying freedoms. Similarly, many of the participants identified "feeling different" early in their lives, and some recalled feelings of wanting to be, or feeling like a boy. Others said they didn't feel like a girl and envied the freedoms associated with being a boy. As many female-bodied people experience a girls' role as limiting, this feeling is not unique to this transgender group. Wanting to be, or feeling like a boy, was not a uniform experience. Ev was most decisive, "I knew that I was a boy. And it became more apparent as I got closer to puberty, age 10, 11, that I was a boy, but I had a girl's body."

Some participants felt comfortable as girls, as Wynn did, "I wore dresses willingly, I was not a tomboy really . . . but I was also very compliant in terms of being

feminine in the ways that I was expected to be, at least by my parents." Karen also felt comfortable being a girl, but based on other people's reactions to her, she knew early on that her girl story was not typical. She explains, "My gender has never been congruent with what is expected of a female, and so there was tension about that." Luckily, Karen had supportive parents who nurtured her strength and athleticism. While she realized she was not the typical girl, she did not feel shame, but empowerment.

Like the female-to-male (FTM) transsexuals in Devor's (1997a) study, puberty was a difficult time for many of the participants, as their developing bodies implied a gender to other people that felt misleading. Andrea said of her body, "It just doesn't feel right and it never has. That's always been there . . . from adolescence forward, it's always been part of the way that I think." Wynn described his discomfort, and how he thinks it differs from traditional transsexuals:

> In junior high and high school I felt uncomfortable with my body, but even now it's hard for me to separate out what was normal, like pubescent growing pains, like most people in high school have some discomfort with their bodies, you know, I think that's just natural and human. And I honestly can't say that I, um, you hear people who say "When I got my period, I wanted to kill myself; when I got breasts I wanted to die." I didn't have that experience. I was certainly awkward and not very much at home in my body, but it wasn't paralyzing.

So, while there was general body discomfort among most of the participants, especially during puberty, it is difficult to know the cause of this discomfort. Many simply felt socially misrepresented as their bodies began to signify a gender that felt inaccurate.

Lesbian

As gender and sexual orientation are not only closely linked, but often conflated, transgender people must discern between the two, or somehow come to understand the distinction, in order to fully understand their identities. In Devor's (1997a) study of 45

female-to-male transsexuals, she found that a majority were sexually oriented toward women, and to varying degrees, most identified as lesbian for some period prior to identifying as FTM transsexual. Cromwell (1999) also notes that many FTMs and transmen live as lesbians prior to identifying as transgender. About half of Devor's participants "threw themselves wholeheartedly into lesbianism" (1997b, p. 95).

In this study, only a few participants identified their gender specifically as a source of feeling different early in life. As the participants entered adolescence and early adulthood, all of them named their feelings as originating from sexual orientation, even though many vaguely (or clearly) sensed that this was also not the sole explanation for their sense of difference. As Quinn described it, he thought, "I'm attracted to women, but I have a woman's body; I'm a woman, so I must be gay." The pervasiveness of the lesbian story obscured other possibilities. Wilchins (2002a) suggests that twenty years ago, transgender people identified as gay.

While "wholehearted" is an unwarranted description, many of the participants in this study settled somewhat comfortably into a lesbian identity, for a while. For some, doing so even offered an opportunity to explore gender variance. For others, identifying as lesbian never felt truly accurate, but the lack of alternative explanations left this as the only viable conclusion. In retrospect, most of the participants see their initial identification as lesbian as a limited-option choice. As Gretchen points out, "It was the only option, at that point." Marg echoes this:

> In college I came out as a lesbian, 'cause I didn't see any other choice. And the more I hung out with people who were very proactive in the feminist movement or, big on women-only space, women-only beliefs, the more I realized that that was just not for me.

For the most part, a lesbian identity was a "default" identity. As Nathan described:

> I identified as a lesbian for a long time, even though that never really felt like it fit, but it felt like my only choice. And nobody was telling me that there was such a thing as transsexuals, or transgender people.

As Sara described, "I haven't known exactly where I fit in. I kind of defaulted into the lesbian group, just to keep it easy and simple to figure it out." Stephanie echoed this sentiment, "I was stuck feeling like I was a lesbian; I was stuck in this community that I didn't fit into." Ezra initially identified as a lesbian although he knew that was not quite accurate:

> I had already started to think, well maybe all this weird stuff about me is that I'm gay. So maybe I'm just a lesbian and I don't know it, or something. That I want to be a guy, so therefore that must mean I'm a dyke of some sort.

Ezra's deduction that lesbians want to be men is not surprising. This pervasive stereotype blurs gender identity and sexual orientation, and contributed to these participants' inability to understand their identity fully. Devor (1997b) concluded that many older FTM transsexuals initially claimed a lesbian identity based on their assumption that lesbians want to be men. As Ezra is 31, that assumption clearly endures.

Like the participants in both Devor's and Cromwell's studies, all but two or three participants discarded the lesbian identity once they found transgender, illustrating how many use transgender as a sexual orientation label as well as a gender identity. Ironically, after differentiating their gender identity from their sexual orientation, the participants merge sexual orientation and gender. These elements of their identity are so connected that an overarching label seems most fitting.

Those who continue to claim a lesbian identity nevertheless complicate it. For example, Andrea retains a lesbian identity even though she has never been comfortable in the lesbian community. She says:

> I don't feel right saying, Okay, I'm a lesbian, and I live in [town], and I'm like every other girl in the bar. I don't think like that; I don't feel like that. And, it's not the kind of relationship I want to have. Because, if I'm with a lover and I'm taking my clothes off, it's not—there's a whole other set of issues at work.

As Andrea's sexual relationships with women are different because of the issues that arise from her feelings about her body, she generally feels quite different from how she perceives other lesbians. This is true for many female-to-male transsexuals and transgender people (Devor, 1997b). Although she does not feel like a lesbian, neither does Andrea feel like, or want to be a man. She says, "I don't want that. . . . that's not quite the answer either." Yet, she says, "It's not as simple as, oh I'm a woman and I like other women." Gesturing two opposite ends of a spectrum, she states, "I still feel like I'm over here, and everybody else is over here." At the same time, Andrea enjoys "being a dyke," and wants to retain her connection to the lesbian community. As Andrea is fairly new to identifying as transgender, she may eventually discard a lesbian identity as her transgender identity grows to be more primary.

Distinguishing between sexual orientation and gender is a very confusing process, especially now that the transsexual story, which supports the gender binary, is culturally available. The challenges and stages of coming to understand one's sexual orientation for gay, lesbian, and bisexual people have been identified (Coleman, 1981-82; 1979; Troiden, 1988), and popular culture has made alternative sexual orientation identities more accessible than in the past. Identifying the feelings of a transgressive gender identity however, remains challenging, given that cultural norms assume a binary gender system. This helps explain why all of the participants initially identified their feelings as associated with sexual orientation rather than gender identity. Karen identified how she conflated the two:

> My experience has been that my coming out process, the lesbian part was in some ways easier than the gender stuff. The gender stuff has been going on since I was really young . . . I was a tomboy and I liked sports and I liked what was traditionally given to boys and I liked being outdoors and climbing trees, and getting dirty and playing with trucks and those kinds of activities. Then when I kind of came out as a lesbian and I started to kind of come out more again, I didn't have a word for it then—but I guess it was transgender . . . I linked gender and sexual orientation up pretty closely.

Although he says he always knew he was "a boy," Ev conflated his attractions to girls and women with his sense of himself as male, "My attractions were to girls and women, so I combined that with just feeling that I was a man inside."

Several participants discussed the internal struggle of understanding that accompanied their coming out process. In their view, coming to identify as transgender was significantly more difficult than coming out as gay, which was, in their eyes, much simpler and clearer. Quinn describes the difficulty of this process:

> When I came out as a gay woman, I didn't give a crap. I was like, big deal, I'm a gay woman. Sure, there were people I didn't want to know, and I was actually a senior in high school, when I started sleeping with a girl. And I definitely hid it, but when I came out, I didn't wonder, am I gay? Like, that's the way that I was. But this is very different. This is very much, a process of figuring it out.

As Quinn articulates, coming out as transgender necessitates figuring out one's gender without having a real understanding of what the options are. It is also an ongoing process, rather than a clear endpoint. In terms of identity, for most people, coming out as gay simply means coming to understand that one is not heterosexual, and this understanding is usually in conjunction with feelings of attraction or desire. In ruling out heterosexual identity, many people can assume fairly conclusively, at least at that moment, that one is gay, lesbian, or bisexual. Gender identity, outside of man and woman, is more complicated. Coming to see one's self as "not woman" does not necessarily indicate "man." These individuals had to question whether they were simply a "different kind of

woman," a different kind of guy," a "gay guy," etc. The choices seemed endless and unclear. River echoes Quinn's differentiation between coming out as a lesbian and coming out as trans:

> I came out [as a lesbian] in an ongoing way from 14 [until] 18 or 19 when I went through a lot of the struggle, the internal struggle with it. So coming out was kind of done for me . . . I was kind of like well, I'm a lesbian, you know, I had to deal with the external stuff but it was really not like a big, I was like, okay, I like girls. It wasn't a big deal for me. And that was much easier to understand and to deal with . . . than dealing with my gender stuff.

Butch

The distinctions between butch and masculinity are hazy. Green (1998) states that the major difference stems from self-definition—more specifically, gender identity. In other words, he states, "When a female-bodied person does not self-identify as female, the capacity to hold the status of . . . butch no longer exists for them" (p. 152). Nevertheless, butch identity is closely associated with lesbian identity, and since all of these participants came out as lesbian prior to identifying as transgender, some also identified as butch, whether by choice or default.

As part of the lesbian community in the 1970s, Ev was completely uncomfortable with a lesbian identity, and "settled" on dyke or stone butch. He explains that there were not identity options that fit how he felt about himself:

> There wasn't any language; there wasn't the word for me. Female-to-male was not even a phrase that had been invented yet. And transgender had not been invented yet. And so I had transsexual, which from everything I was seeing, was male-to-females, or I had stone butch dyke. And so that's where I landed for a few years.

As a default identity, few of the participants actually identified with being butch, which Halberstam (1998) defines as "dyke masculinity" (p. 152). Some claimed it initially because it was the only option, while others felt forced into that role because of

their masculine presentation. Lee and Sara said that while others might identify them as butch, they felt no connection to the identity. Nathan explained, "What option did I have when I was the way I looked? I obviously had to be butch. . . . In some ways, I was just butch by default." Though Marg always acted in what he termed a "male role," and early on, emulated the "standard stereotypical tough guy ethical codes, the behavioral codes," he never interpreted this as butch behavior. However, he said, identifying as butch was "easier to do than fight the system. It was much easier for me to say, okay this is a code and if that makes me a stone butch, then fine that's what I am."

In addition to being a default identity, some participants identified as butch because of the forced choice between butch and femme. For example, Gretchen identified initially as butch in the 1980s:

> [As] the whole butch/femme thing came more out, then I felt like I was able to put a label to myself and so of course I gravitated to what kind of made sense to me. Well, these people kind of look like I look, so I must be butch (laughing), and that is pretty much how I did it. . . . It never [fit me] but it was the only option.

Similarly, Stephanie identified as butch initially in rejection of femme, "When I was [identified as] a lesbian, that was the only label that fit, 'cause I certainly wasn't a femme." When he came out as a lesbian, Grady felt that the sole options were butch and femme. As a butch, he felt a lot of pressure to be a certain "vague reflection of a guy," and his articulation of masculinity felt confined in a way that didn't feel comfortable. His feelings of being a guy were significantly different than those supposedly embodied by butch lesbians. He explained, "In the lesbian community . . . they love the butches but they don't really want them to be male." Additionally, he said, "Most butch dykes are female-identified, and I never was." As Halberstam's "dyke masculinity" implies, a female—not male—attribution necessarily accompanies butch. Grady's experience

echoes those of the participants in Devor's (1997b) study who initially "delighted" in the "increased tolerance for their masculinity they found among lesbian women," but were soon limited by the community's "social and sexual values "(p. 94).

Overall, among this sample, there is a strong sentiment that butch is decidedly different than transgender, with a primary reason being that butch necessarily implies female. For some, this distinction stirred up intense feelings. Stephanie gets angry when people identify her as butch, because "that is so not who I am." Alex's recent experiences demonstrate the friction among the GLB and transgender communities, "I was told I was a sellout [for] coming out as transgendered. . . . like, all butch women are turning into FTMs." Though Green (1998) asserts that butch women have always been held in high regard in the lesbian community, Halberstam (1998) notes that these "border wars" between butch lesbians and transgender men "presume that masculinity is a limited resource, available to only a few" (p. 144). Further, some lesbians retain the view that transgender-identified female-bodied people and FTMs perpetuate the stereotype that lesbians want to men (Devor, 1997b). Moreover, like Raymond's ([1979]1994) assertion that FTM transsexuals are "the ultimate colluders" (p. xxv), some lesbians perceive FTMs as accessing male privilege, and therefore "selling out." As the only participant who identified strongly as butch, Trey has redefined (Ekins & King, 2001) the butch story to fit him. Though he knows that butch identity implies female, he claims a new identity as a butch boy.

Transsexual

The transsexual story, in which body dysphoria compels one to physically transition to a different sex, is fairly straightforward and, given the dichotomous sex

system, fairly comprehensible. As the most available non-traditional gender story, all of the participants became familiar with it early in their lives, as by the 1970s and 1980s, transsexuality became public knowledge (Devor, 1997b). The transsexual story was probably the most powerful story to which these participants compared their own. Most were clear that they did not identify as transsexual, especially since transsexuals seemed to be male-to-female. However, the existence of transsexuality offered some hope that their own identity might also have a name.

Most of the participants became more familiar with the transsexual story when they sought out or otherwise consulted transgender support networks. As the members of this sample come from around the country, they experienced a range of interactions with their local communities. Nevertheless, the transsexual story seemed to be the focus of most communities. Assimilation and learning to act like the desired gender are key elements of the transsexual story (Bornstein, 1994). Even Ev, who identifies as non-operative transsexual, rejects the assimilationist expectation of the transsexual story because, he says, "I want people to know all of me." Karen is one participant who sought out support in the transgender community, only to face the dominance of the transsexual story:

> I did a little investigating to see what was available in [my city] and I found this group . . . and I looked at their support groups and I couldn't figure out which one to go to because they were called Desert Boyz and Desert Girlz. And when I read the description, Desert Boyz were people who were born in a female body that don't feel like that fits them. And Desert Girlz were people who were born in a male body and don't feel like that complete—And I was like, I don't really want to go to any group called boys because I am not a boy. I don't want to go be a boy and I don't want to be perceived as a boy, like I am a girl; I'm a woman, a dyke, and so it took me a while to finally go. And then when I went to a meeting I was freaked out because they were all transsexuals and most of them pretty well into or through . . . their transition process. . . . And so the discussions would be around testosterone and facial hair and it really didn't feel like it had anything to do with my experience.

Karen's story not only did not match the available narrative, but she found that there was no room for variance from this story within the transsexual support group community. Without a reflection of her identity, Karen was unable to find support in this group. Wilchins (2002a) suggests that this is a common occurrence. While some people, like Karen, found their experience completely absent in the trans community, others found it—at the bottom of the hierarchy.

As Wilchins (2002b) points out, "boundaries and hierarchies emerge whenever we try to base politics on identity" (p. 29). The transsexual hierarchy is well-known and understood in the transgender community (Bornstein, 1994); transsexual stories reign at the top, with those identifying as non-transitioning and transgender at the bottom. In the disease model, those who "have it the worst" (Bornstein, 1994, p. 63) gain the most respect. Additionally, those who pass as their new gender most convincingly are most esteemed (Wilchins, 2002a). As Karen explains, "The hierarchy is that the more congruent that you are with how you are going to identify, then the more power you have in the trans movement."

In some ways, it is a hierarchy of credibility signifying whose trans experience is most valid. According to Ezra, who is a regional coordinator of a national FTM group, the hierarchy is as follows:

> If you are transitioned [you] would be at the top. . . . and anything that's transitioned is above anyone who's not. The next one down would be anyone who's about to transition. Anybody who would like to, but doesn't have the money, or would like to, but hasn't gotten there yet. Or plans on it. Next below that is yes, you definitely identify as a guy, but you're not gonna transition because of health reasons . . . and anything below that would be genderqueer. Like, that's the four year college plan, you guys will get over it, you don't suffer like we do. You don't have body dysphoria like we do.

Ezra's comment demonstrates that the medical model retains a heavy influence in the transgender community. Many transsexuals privilege their experience as more valid because it is deemed a clinical "condition," not a choice (Bornstein, 1994; Rubin, 1996). Secondly, because it is presumably an involuntary condition, some transsexuals claim to suffer in ways that non-transsexual transgender-identified people do not. Therefore, those who experience body dysphoria to the extent that they pursue surgery or hormones have the most status. Because they are lacking any "physical proof" of their preferred gender, those who are viewed as able to get by without physical changes have the least. Physically changing the body externalizes internal, invisible feelings. Legitimacy seems to come from the willingness to use the body to signify gender. As Wilchins (2002a) states, changing the body is "a litmus test for transgression" (p. 60).

The "biology versus choice" issue is not new; gays and lesbians have been challenged by this question for many years (Whisman, 1995). Many participants shared stories of seeking out the transgender community, only to be told that they weren't "really" transgender, because their identity was a choice. Though Bornstein (1994) encourages unity among "gender outlaws" (p. 69), divisions within the community

remain. Still, the emergence of genderqueer identity gives hope that there is increasing room for gender diversity in the transgender community.

Unfortunately, the perceived hierarchy within transgender communities wields a lot of social power. The major effect of the transsexual story is the expectation that anyone who identifies as transgender will transition and physically change their sex. As a result, in the transsexual community, making physical changes to one's body is a sign of validity. As Ezra explains, there is "a lot of pressure for—you'll be more, people *believe* you more, if you do it. 'T is wonderful. It's the thing that'll fix everything.'" Trey shared his perspective that once he found the trans community, he also found pressure to transition:

> More and more of my friends who start transitioning, they'd be like, "Oh, when are you gonna start 'T'? Don't you want to change your name? Who do you want to have for your surgeon?" Which is important to talk about, I guess. But, it's just so, there's a lot of pressure. And even when I say like, no, I don't want to do it until I'm ready, or I don't know what I want to do, it's almost like "Oh, well why don't you just do this?" Or, "This is all you have to do, and then you can do it." Which is something that I really don't like about the trans community.

Physical transition is perceived as a cure-all, which assumes that everyone's "condition" is the same. Sal experienced this at the local female-bodied transgender support group:

> There's such a feeling of, you gotta be taking "T." You know, I'll go in there and I'll relate to someone who says, "Oh, I'm not sure what I want to do," and then the next week I come to the meeting, they're like, "I'm taking T now!" You sit there and you feel like—talk about feeling like you're not one of the guys. And you just—it's like, who am I? Where do I fit it?

Though "T" is right for many transgender people, Bornstein (1994) reminds us that people address their gender identity in a variety of ways. Sal's self questioning is in response to the absence of seeing one's self-reflection in a group where people go to find just this. The dominance of the clinical story obscures the possibilities, and leaves people

unable to articulate their own story. In confronting and rejecting the traditional transsexual story, participants felt the validity of their stories challenged. As they found a community where they expected to finally fit in or find commonality, they were sometimes even more unsure of their own story. As Nathan described it, "I'm comfortable with the identity, but I'm not sure if I'm comfortable with the trans community."

The dominance of the transsexual story affects people in different ways. Ezra shared that it felt almost too difficult to live a life in between—transgender yet not transitioned—"I very much advocate the spot that I'm in, and in addition, I'm having a very hard time living a practical life in this position." As a result of feeling continually misunderstood, Karen relies more on the identity of butch, even though it doesn't capture who she is either:

> From my experience, when I say transgender, people picture that I am at the beginning of some process that is going to finish with me becoming a man. I think when you say I am butch, at least within the lesbian community, there is a context for that and it is like oh, okay. You are a masculine woman.

Only two people said explicitly that they felt welcome as non-transitioning people at transgender groups. Lee attends meetings at a well-known transgender organization in his city, and says that while there is pressure to transition, it is "self imposed" because of envy. In other words, he says "You just feel pulled in that direction. But it is never anyone pulling you. If you speak to them individually they don't pressure [you]." Wynn was the only other person to clearly state that in his support group, there is a wide range of identities represented, and respect for them all. While Lee says he finds the support groups he attends to be welcoming of non-transitioning folks, he feels it is important for him to stay involved as an "example of the range" of identities. He says:

> It is sometimes kind of an awkward place because you don't see people like me on talk shows and stuff; it is considered a non-category. So I think it is important for me to be involved and part of the group . . . just to show well, here, this is valid transgender expression too.

Ezra acknowledged that the oppressive transsexual-centered perspectives are often those of older generations, he also hears these comments from people his own age. Though organizations have formed in response to the privileging of transsexual stories (American Boyz), pressure to "transition" prevails within the community. However, some participants said that they had not felt any pressure to transition. Transgender conferences increasingly feature a "transgender" track that focuses on issues other than surgery and transitioning. Ev says that at recent conferences he has noticed that, "Everyone is really dialoging with each other, [about] the judgments, the hierarchy, everyone has talked about the hierarchy and that the hierarchy should go."

Some tried to apply the transsexual story to themselves, and wondered if they too were transsexual. Others felt clear that since they weren't transsexual—and they certainly weren't like the transsexuals presented on talk shows—their identity was not at all related to transsexuality. As Sal said, "The only thing I knew about transgender individuals was mostly what you saw and heard about the male-to-female people who are transgender and transition. . . . I never saw anyone who was like me." The major reasons these participants did not connect with the transsexual story relate mostly to the body and gender identity. First, they did not necessarily hate or want to change their bodies. Secondly, they were not entirely clear that they wanted to be a man. Ultimately, their story is different because they retain a transgender identity, while traditional transsexuals are expected (by clinicians) and usually do assimilate into society in their new gender,

discarding their past. Although this approach to gender transformation is increasingly rejected, it has nevertheless been dominant in transsexual stories.

Man

Only a few participants explicitly identified as men, although a few others alluded to this identity. Ev attributes his age as one reason he identifies as a straight man. When he was growing up, heterosexual man and woman were the only choices. He reflected:

> If I was given the choice of "You're just a boy and you got this body, no problem, that means you're transgender," I never would have had to think of myself as a straight man. I would have thought of myself as a transgendered adolescent who wanted to be with women. . . . the whole straight man thing isn't that common, but it is because I'm 51 years old. Times are changing.

Grady, 46, also addressed his feeling of being a heterosexual man, and expressed how his internal feelings differ from his expressed identity. First, he describes how he sees himself:

> I see myself as a straight guy. Definitely. And I have always been that, and now of course I'm allowing it to totally emerge, I'm realizing how much I've always related it [to] that. And just how frustrating it's been for me to keep that squelched down.

At the same time, Grady believes that since he was born female, he will never be a "true" man. He said:

> I guess ideally I would like to be a straight guy. But, and, I know a lot of transmen do live as straight guys and no one necessarily knows except their wife that they're trans. But, internally, I feel like I can't ever actually, I mean, I'm not. I mean, biologically, I'm female . . . so that does make me trans. And I will always be that, because there's no way around that. So, I suppose that's partly again, why I have a hard time with this because I think some part of me just—I mean, I don't want to be trans—I want to be a straight guy. And I never can be.

Grady's distinction between the way he sees himself and the way he articulates his identity speaks to the power of the interaction of self and attribution, as well as the centrality of the body in determining gender. For Grady, even though he knows his

identity to be a man, he privileges his body's expression of sex over his own internal feelings. His recognition that society will see him as female, no matter how he views himself, determines his final identity.

It is noteworthy that the two participants most identified with a heterosexual man identity are the two oldest participants. However, as Ev asserts, times are changing. Overall, most of the participants rejected the straightforward story of being a man, as they felt that "man" simply did not fully capture their identity. Nathan, 33, consciously rejected identifying as a man, as he felt that doing so supported a dichotomous gender system. Linking "man" with sexual orientation, several of the participants made it clear that just as their gender was complex, their sexual orientation was equally so. Even though some of them identified as masculine (or men), they felt they could still reject a heterosexual identity. Trey describes this:

> I never feel like I'm a straight guy. I don't think I've ever really felt that way even though I am sexually attracted to women and, you know, if I identify as male, then I guess that makes me a straight guy. But being queer is such an important part of me that I really . . . don't want to be seen as [a straight guy].

These participants are able to complicate gender and sexual orientation and their supposed connection. Though they were not always able to find specific words or identities to describe themselves, they were able to articulate what they were not.

FTM (Transgender)

In addition to the stories of the dominant culture, there are stories in the transgender community that influenced these participants. Even after distinguishing transgender from transsexual, many people had retained misconceptions about what they understood transgender to be. As a result, there was a pervasive feeling of, "That's not me, so I guess I'm not that." For example, Wynn thought that transgender was the

farthest point on a masculinity scale (Halberstam, 1998). This misperception initially prevented him from claiming a transgender identity. Only when he realized that transgender was not equivalent to extreme masculinity, was he able to claim the identity for himself. Stevi also experienced this; zi had assumed that transgender meant you identified as a boy. Upon hearing about the possibility of genderqueer, Stevi realized that there might be a place for hir under the transgender identity umbrella.

When first thinking about coming out as transgender, Ezra was partnered with a transitioning FTM who had very rigid ideas about what it is to be a transman. Ezra explains their conflict:

> It [gender] seemed more complex to me than it did to him. To him it seemed very clear. You were either A or B. To me it seemed like well, here's choices 1 through 1,000. And somewhere in here is the right one.

Since at the time Ezra wasn't especially familiar with the trans community, he at first went by what his partner maintained was appropriate:

> He would say FTM was this straight sort of paradigm. He had very specific—he was very into passing. He had specific ways to walk, he had specific ways to dress, specific ways you talked, specific things you were into, and some of it seemed to be very straight, stereotypical. He liked girls, he was into women, and he would take what straight men looked like and he would try to do that. And then he would turn around and try to say to me, well, if you're really this, you should look like this. And I couldn't quite make that fit. So I thought that because it doesn't fit, then I can't be what he is. And he was on the verge of starting testosterone . . . and I was very clearly not at that phase and I thought well see, he says it's these things, and he's here at this position in his life, and that equals FTM. Therefore, I don't equal FTM.

Using his partner's story as the model, Ezra assumed he wasn't FTM, at least in the same way. It took meeting some gay-male-identified FTMs for Ezra to learn that there were alternatives to his partner's traditional heterosexual male paradigm. Ezra learned lots of

"rules" about being FTM from his partner, but was able to make up his own once they broke up.

In this section, I have described how the participants reacted and responded to the available dominant cultural stories. While the participants may have identified with particular perceived qualities of the identities of woman, man, lesbian, butch, transsexual, and FTM, these narratives did not fully explain their story. Upon rejecting these possibilities as the sole description of their experience, the participants were compelled to create their own story. In the next section, I examine where the participants found pieces of their stories, and how they came to create their own.

Finding Stories

Learning about the Possibilities

Besides realizing, responding and reacting to the dominant stories, these participants eventually came into contact with narratives that diverged from the traditional transsexual story. While there wasn't always instant identification, for every participant, contact with the possibility of a non-transsexual transgender identity offered new understanding, insight, and hope. This new conception of gender opened up the possibility of the existence of a gendered category with which they could identify. In this process of "discovery," participants found a "name which had the potential to make sense of the constellation of feelings which they were experiencing" (Devor, 1997a, p. 601). An understanding of how these participants first encountered the concept of transgender can help keep those possibilities open for others.

Devor (1997) found that 36% of her sample identified as transsexual as soon as they heard the term and understood its meaning (p. 360). In the present study, some

participants instantly identified with the term *transgender*; learning about the possibilities of transgender identity offered them a language and frame to help understand what they had already been feeling, but been unable to name. Three participants were spurred into thinking about gender issues only after coming into contact with transgender language or ideas. It was not that they had always felt comfortable in their gender, but that they had not known there were alternatives, and therefore had simply buried or ignored their feelings. Most importantly, contact with alternatives to the traditional transsexual story helped each participant begin to construct his or her own story.

Meeting another transgender person, reading about the concept or about a person such as Jess in *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg, 1993), or seeing a movie such as *Boys Don't Cry* (Pierce & Bienen, 1999) were some of the ways that these participants first came into contact with the notion of transgender identity. For most, initial contact launched an ongoing educational experience; they sought out more information and other transgender people, conducting a "textual search"—a scanning of the stories available to help see who one is" (Plummer, 1995, p. 85). For many it was an "Aha" experience; in one moment they had the ability to name themselves in a way that had so far eluded them. For others, initial contact launched a learning and self-discovery process toward claiming a transgender identity. Regardless of whether or not there was instant identification, coming into contact with the concept of transgender was a defining moment. Until this point, the participants had no language for how their gendered conception of themselves fit in with the rest of the world.

It is important to note the historical conditions that have allowed these participants to claim a transgender identity. Without the evolution of language and the

available texts such as Bornstein (1994) and Feinberg (1993), a transgender identity would not be widely available. Thus, this identity is rooted in an historical era, drawing upon the post-modern deconstruction of gender that has dominated multiple disciplines.

First Contacts

For most participants, first meeting other transgender people had a powerful impact. Andrea says that when she first met a transgender guy, it was like "finally meeting somebody that . . . understood." Sal relayed that meeting non-transsexual identified transgender people helped her realize, "Wait a minute, there are people who are like me, and it isn't the stereotype I have to fit into." Only by meeting people she could identify with was Sal able to realize that her understanding of herself—which did not match the transsexual story—was a valid story.

Stephanie's experience is typical of many of the participants. She knew that transsexuals existed but didn't feel any particular connection with that experience. Yet she always felt like she didn't fit in anywhere. It was only upon reading *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg, 1993) that she began the process of coming out to herself:

> I knew that transsexuals existed, I didn't really have the concept of being transgendered. . . . And when I read that book . . . that was it. That was the beginning of the coming out to myself. . . . There was this huge missing piece of the puzzle that I found.

The dominance of the transsexual story had prevented Stephanie from being able to make sense of herself as a transgender-identified person. She knew she wasn't a man or a transsexual, but didn't know of any other options.

Wynn also found himself in the pages of a book—reading Feinberg (1993) and Bornstein (1994) helped him realize that what he had been doing by trying to be a girl was "acting, like I was trying to mimic something I wasn't very good at." When he found

transgender identity, he thought, "This doesn't feel like an act, this feels more honest than anything else before." Going to transgender meetings where a range of identities were welcome helped him further expand his understanding of transgender even more.

Once finding the language, many of these participants felt an immediate sense of identification and clarity. Finally, an identity that seemed to capture how they felt about gender. As Trey said, "As soon as I had the language around it and as soon as I understood what it's about, it was like, oh, then that's me." After years of confusion, these initial contacts brought clarity.

Once you know something, you can't not know it

As Trey articulated, "If it hits home for you, you can't go back." For most participants, initial contact with transgender information affected them this way. It was a point of no return. For Andrea, this was a frightening prospect. She attended a support group for female-born transgender-identified people, and very much identified with others' stories and feelings. This aroused a sense of fear, as she realized this would be a lifelong struggle. Identifying so much with the support group members caused her to think, "Maybe this really is what it is about." Quinn's self discovery process was set in motion by a film:

> I went to the movie *Boys Don't Cry* with my partner, and I watched the movie and I was like, whoa this is intense, and this is amazing, and horrible. [We] came out of the movie theater and my partner went to the restroom and I'm just standing and waiting, and kind of looking around. It was so subtle that I couldn't even quite put my finger on it, but the thought crossed my mind, what if I am? But it was kind of strange. Because before I had seen this movie I didn't even know what transgender really was. I thought it kind of had to do with guys cross-dressing or something. . . . So standing there I was just kind of dumbfounded a little bit. And again, it was not quite able to reach my conscious mind, completely. It was this real subtle thing. . . . But as far as, just coming to the realization, that's how it happened. Just very subtle.

Quinn's experience is illustrative of the power of the dominant story. Prior to seeing this film, his only understanding of the concept of transgender was vague associations with transvestites. The portrayal of Brandon Teena's story helped him understand that there were female-bodied people who identified as guys. While some people see Brandon Teena as pre-transsexual, others see him as transgender. When he began thinking about his own identity, Quinn said, a lot of things began to make sense, and he felt relief.

Quinn later began a "process of elimination" to figure out if any of the existing identities felt right for him. Since Quinn didn't have any information or role models, he actively sought out information and identities with which to compare himself. Each transperson with which he came into contact acted as a mirror, reflecting parts of himself, or not. Unlike boys and girls, who are socialized into roles, some comfortable, some not, and who for the most part, have role models of how to think about their identity (though that is also limiting), Quinn's process of elimination seemed to be the only way of his finding "what is me." Without the necessary tools, Quinn was unable to create a new story. Instead, he surveyed the existing stories to see what fit. It was like trying to put together a puzzle without any idea of the larger image. Ezra also experienced this, "I went through a lot of things. And saying, no this, no that, and I haven't heard many people say that." This process of elimination makes interaction with other transgender people especially important, as Calvin describes, "Being around transpeople is one more place where we can get a reflection of who we are, to decide, hm—yup that, um—not that."

Naming and Claiming

Gay and lesbian coming out stories often reveal a motif of finding a "true self" (Stein, 1997) that had simply been awaiting discovery. Transgender stories, despite their similarity to gay coming out stories, do not necessarily reveal a premise of "true self." Like Cromwell (1998) argues about female-to-male transsexuals, "There is no shift from conceiving oneself as female to that of a man. . . the individual has never identified as female" (p. 128). Instead, individuals describe finding a language, a framework, for understanding one's self. Rather than a new understanding of one's self, there is a new capacity to understand what was already known. Nathan describes this:

> I think I've lived it for so long that the identity . . . it was already there. And so living that way makes it really different than saying, oh, one day I woke up and I've realized that [I'm trans].

As Nathan points out, he was already "living it," whereas most gay people name their "coming out" as beginning when they began "living it;" in other words, realized their attractions to the same sex. They then began their process of claiming a gay identity. Coming out for gay people is about claiming an available identity and acting on it, while coming out for transgender people is about naming an existing sense of self, a sense that is already "being." The self-image has not changed, other than realizing a renewed ability to name it. As Trey said:

> I don't identify as female, and I never had the language around it and never really understood that there were other options. It's not like I heard about transgender and then I *decided* that this is what I wanted to do, it was just like things made sense to me.

Stein (1997) argues that lesbians rely on the existing available accounts in order to construct their stories. Transgender people cannot necessarily rely on public stories in the construction of their own. Rather than claiming an existing story, the process is more

about realizing the possibility of rejecting the available ones. As Ev states, "When did I come to identify as transgendered? . . . That sense of myself was always there. I didn't have a word for it." Transgender coming out is about discovering that this is a nameable possibility.

In this section, I described how first contacts with the concept of transgender gave these participants the power to name themselves in a way that had previously been inaccessible to them. For most, this initial identification with the term initiated the process of being able to articulate their own story. By accessing the language necessary to describe their experiences, they were able to remove the "wedge between the being and the telling" (Plummer, 1995, p. 127) that previously inhibited any articulation of this experience.

Creating Stories

How do you live in a world who doesn't acknowledge anything that you are? You have no pronouns that are appropriate, you have no recognition of what you are and you don't have—the rest of society doesn't have language for what that is. (Ezra)

Stein (1997) asserts that "identity is not a "truth" that is discovered; it is a "performance enacted" (p. 89). Identities do not spring forth from individuals, but individuals effect change in the meanings of particular identities. The emergence of transgender stories has made accessible a potential that widens rather than narrows the gender possibilities. Nevertheless, in the quote above, Ezra sums up the difficulties of establishing a new identity given the general lack of language, awareness, and acknowledgement. As Calvin describes:

> It's the deepest of personal searches, because it totally goes against what is reflected everywhere—everywhere: the media, your best friends' mouths, queer people's mouths, straight people's mouths, everything that comes out, is so specific about gender. . . . So you're totally going against what every message you get, everywhere. You have to kind of push through all of that, to say, okay, but which of these do I buy, which of these don't I?

Even once transgender people come to understand themselves, the lack of recognition in society makes maintaining and developing this understanding challenging. A principle of symbolic interaction is that symbols, including the self, have social significance because they become meaningful through interaction. What does this mean for the transgender self that is socially unrecognized? The use of symbols depends upon mutual understanding of the meanings involved, so until transgender is a socially recognized or "public" identity (Plummer, 1995), individuals in interaction cannot define the situation in a way that will feel meaningful to a transgender person (Hewitt, 1994).

Redefining, Concealing, and Implying

Our sense of ourselves as gendered beings is an "ongoing composition" (Jackson & Scott, 2001) which requires that we compose ourselves bodily. Additionally, the body's presentation is culturally structured as binary, limiting the options transgender people can explore. Ekins and King (2001) describe four processes that transgender people use to manage their bodies: substituting, concealing, implying, and redefining. As the only participant who had attained surgery, Marg utilized substitution—replacing body parts which are associated with one gender, with those associated with the other. More commonly, participants conceal (by binding breasts or wearing baggy clothes), imply (projecting the image of a penis by "packing"), and redefine, in which the body and self take on new meaning.

There are a number of ways that these participants utilized the process of redefining, especially in terms of the body. For example, Stevi described how zi began re-viewing hir own body, "Because I see myself as a transperson, when I look at my breasts, I don't see women's breasts, I see my breasts. And they're different." Even though breasts are perhaps the most primary female indicator, Stevi is able to redefine them as not indicating a female body. Participants applied this process in interaction with others as well as the self. Ezra describes how he learned to redefine what it means to look like a man through interactions with his FTM partners:

> To me, male in some cases represents much more a clothed image than it does an absolute naked image. . . . 'cause for years I've been dating FTMs and that's not what guy was. Guy didn't represent, a penis didn't represent—I mean, all *other* sorts [of] cues represented guy, because of dating FTMs. Strapping on didn't even necessarily represent guy per se, because it was just, that's something that women did too. And certain parts didn't represent guy, because I've been with women who have female parts and I've been with guys who have female parts. So biological sex didn't tell me anything about male or female, or man or woman. That doesn't give me any information. It just tells me what you may or may not use logistically, to feel good. But that's all I know. So it's not an identifier to me.

Here, Ezra distinguishes the physical body from gender identity, and why that distinction has become central in his interactions.

Having a functional penis is quite unusual among transgender men, even among fully transitioned FTM transsexuals (Harrison, 1996). Regardless, they are considered men in the transgender community (Cromwell, 1999). In this story, the absence of a penis is normalized and gender is self defined; disconnecting the body from gender is in fact central to the story. Griggs (1998) found that female-to-male transsexuals found comfort in the visual confirmation of gender in the form of the penis, but its absence did not disqualify them as men. Redefining in this sense then, is essential, as a penis must no longer be necessary as a signifier of maleness, and a vagina must no longer indicate

femaleness. Instead, other signifiers take the place of the penis, and externalizing one's gender through appearance and behavior becomes more central.

Given its unfeasibility, the desire for a penis is redefined as unimportant, or irrelevant. In this study, very few participants expressed any desire for a penis; they addressed questions about the body in terms of their chest and other masculinizing features such as muscles and hair. However, when asked directly, many acknowledged that a penis would be "great!" Yet, since bottom surgery is so unavailable and has a reputation of being substandard—therefore not worth the trouble—its absence becomes part of the story. As Stephanie stated, "It just feels like self-inflicted pain. Let's not go there." Ezra commented, "If I could wake up anatomically male, oh yeah. But that's just not something I think about a lot, because I can't have it, so I don't actually think about it." Although many transgender people would be interested in having a functioning penis, that desire is redefined as outside the consciousness or as unimportant. As Ezra explained:

> I'd love one! . . . When I fantasize about stuff and think about things, I definitely think about myself that way, having a penis and having everything anatomically actually male. But I don't actually put a lot of time into obsessing about it, because I don't think it's worthwhile because I can't have that, and I can never have that. . . . It's just crying after candy you can't get out of the store.

Ezra's explanation of his feelings about bottom surgery and having a penis show a contradiction. He says he rarely thinks about that, and yet when he "fantasizes" and "thinks about things," he says "I definitely think about myself that way."

The absence of this topic in the interviews could indicate a number of things. Certainly, some of the participants have no interest in having a penis, and do not feel that it is "missing." Even those that expressed feeling body dysphoria did not necessarily

locate this dysphoria in their lower genitals. Secondly, participants may be redefining—in essence, ignoring the "candy" since it is not within the realm of possibility. This motif is key in FTM transgender stories.

While an actual penis is rendered irrelevant, dildos or "prosthetics" become culturally meaningful. Many of the participants acknowledged "packing," but only one did so on a daily basis. Quinn explained that he'd been wearing his prosthetic since the first day he bought it. He explained its meaning:

> I like how it looks. I look down and I see a bulge, and I like it. . . . One thing that I notice is that once I started wearing one, I all of a sudden had this confidence. Like there was a way that I felt about myself, this way that I carried myself a little bit differently. Although I've always carried myself a certain way. But there was something, I don't know if I'd call it power, but in a way, not power against, or power over other people, but just more like, maybe it was just more that it was more me. But I didn't know it, until that point.

The meaning Quinn attributes to his "bulge" gives him self-confidence, and confirms his identity. Calvin agreed:

> I have experienced the same feeling of packing and feeling the sense of, I don't know if I would call it power, but definitely realness. . . . For me, it's not at all just being sexual. It's about being male. Feeling male. And that helps me to feel male. Sometimes that's what I need.

In distinguishing the feeling of "realness" associated with packing from sexuality, both Quinn and Calvin demonstrate that the prosthetic carries cultural meaning that they utilize to externalize their internal sense of maleness. Whether or not anyone else knows it's there, the act of packing supports their sense of identity, contributing to the sense of "power" described by both Quinn and Calvin.

When it comes to the body and sexuality, some of the participants are able to redefine their bodies. Ev rewrites his body story to fit what suits him now:

> I've always had a cock. Period. You know, I have this, I'm extremely creative. And I'm also, I'm very, very imaginative. And I just have always felt like I already have one. So it's just, I project that. And in sexual activity, that's just a fact. It doesn't matter what it actually looks like, it's just there.

Ev's experience speaks to Thomas's (1928) concept that if something is perceived as real, it is real for them:

> When I'm wearing a prosthetic, a dildo, I feel like the damn thing has nerve endings. It's just this really intense mind projection to have an organ that I don't have. And that seems to work for me and that's enough for me. . . . I do a lot of it in my imagination and it's just like, it's just so well imagined that it's real. And it's real for my partner.

Nathan's experience is similar; he says, "It's so attached to me, it's so eroticized, that it's like, when someone touches me, touches my cock, that it might as well be real."

Redefining was not always successful, as Calvin addressed how using a prosthetic wasn't always entirely satisfying or helpful:

> It can be a reminder, instead of it helping me feel the realness, in fact, it sometimes does the reverse of being a reminder of what I don't have. It can go one way or the other, but it can take away my feeling of yah, I really have this. 'Cause, nope, it's not attached to me. And I'm totally enjoying the act and the pleasure that it brings somebody else, but it can be sad for me, 'cause it can take away; it can just bring way too close to reality what I don't have.

So while some, like Ev, are able to redefine their bodies to be what they want, others are less able to do so.

Other "props" (Plummer, 1995) also take on cultural meaning, as Wynn described how he "conceals" (Ekins & King, 2001) his chest through the use of an ace bandage:

> I enjoy the camaraderie with other trans guys who have numerous binding stories, who have that primary connotation with an ace bandage. These signifiers come to mean the same thing for people and I think that's in part what creates the community and what holds it together and I enjoy it. It's kind of having an inside joke with a whole bunch of other people.

Binding then becomes more than a method to influence gender attribution; it becomes an important aspect of transgender stories. Binding, while important for passing, has also become central to transgender expression, moving beyond the personal to the cultural level.

Ultimately, the body becomes secondary to self definition, although it is nevertheless utilized to express that gender. So, in one sense, the body and gender are disconnected, and yet through redefinition, the body is crucial to express the internal sense of gender. As Jackson and Scott (2001) assert, the body conveys gender. We cannot escape the presentation of our bodies, and individuals therefore must make use of it to externalize the internal.

Transition

In the traditional view, transition begins when a transsexual individual "prepares to live full-time in the new gender role," and ends after "genital reconstruction or when the individual senses that the transition has ended" (Denny & Green, 1996, p. 87). Transition is complete, they state, when the individual has fully integrated into society. But for female-to-male transgender people, there is no clear post-operative end (Cromwell, 1999), and many female-to-male transgender people do not pursue bottom surgery (Harrison, 1996). Further, these participants do not necessarily aspire to integrate into society.

In her study of male-to-female transsexuals, Bolin (1988) describes transition as a process of becoming female, both hormonally and socially. Bolin's participants followed "informal parameters" of rules, norms, and rituals that transsexuals have created for the "proper way" a man is transformed into a woman (p. 20). These cultural markers have

been identified for female-to-male transsexuals (Garfinkle, 1967), but what are the markers, the cultural norms and rituals for transgender people?

What does transition mean for transgender people, for whom the goal may not be transformation to a different sex? If gender is a continuous process, what does transition mean when there is no clear endpoint or goal? Unlike the clear move from one sex to another in Bolin's sample, (some of) these participants were not becoming men, but transmen. Therefore, they could not, and did not necessarily follow any particular "rites of passage" into manhood.

Since the participants in this study have diverse ideas about what it means to be transgender, they also have disparate beliefs about what "transition" means. Beyond physical changes, transition includes any of the social, legal, or emotional changes made in efforts to express one's internal sense of self. For Stevi, transitioning is about "the process of coming out to everyone around me." For Quinn, coming out is about how he perceives himself, and about the initial external changes he is making, such as wearing the clothes in which he feels most comfortable. Coming out is about giving himself permission to express his gender. Additionally, Quinn articulates that he still feels susceptible to the dominant stories:

> There's a lot of different ways of transitioning, and issues and areas to transition, but it's more just this movement, into yourself. Into becoming what feels right. And it's very difficult in a society, where there's some very specific places you're supposed to go, and boxes to fit into. And I too, have to catch myself in thinking, well, if I'm trans, I have to act a certain way, or dress a certain way. It's like, no, what feels right to me?

Others also discussed the pressures and strong community norms in regards to transition. Like many of the participants, Grady found that taking "T" was a rite of passage of sorts. At the same time, Grady was able to reject this expectation:

> I haven't talked to any transgendered guy at this point that doesn't take it or isn't on a T program. Because you cannot be a guy if you don't do it. And I've really thought about it a lot. But I just can't come up with why I can't be, I mean, I'm obviously proving it to myself. I'm making that transition just fine without it.

Grady explained that he is able to become the man he wants to be without opting for physical changes. Though he perceives his to be a "man" story, he distinguishes himself from transitioning FTMs, as he notices, "There seems to be a process, and I'm not going through that process in the same way. . . . I'm making more, maybe different kind of choices about how I'm going through the process." Rather than pursuing physical changes through hormonal treatments, Grady is doing so by weight training and changing how he "holds" his "energy." It is in the process of embodying his physical self that Grady is making changes. For him, this is transition. Marg explained:

> I think there's a part of me that's never going to stop transitioning. That spiritual, emotional piece of me, but it's not just about gender. It's about becoming the person that I want to be in the world. And my gender definitively plays into that, but doesn't define that transition, for the most part. And for me, there is a piece of the physical transition. What starts to really piss me off is when the community says, when did you transition? Like you can pinpoint this particular date. It's a nonstop process.

Marg's allusion to "the community's" desire to know when he transitioned speaks to the power of the dominant story, in which there is a particular point of transition from one place to another.

For the majority of participants in this sample, their ideal gender is exactly how they are at this moment. Rather than pinpointing a moment in time when they transitioned, they are in a process of gender exploration—in determining what gender means and will continue to mean in their lives. They view gender as a process, not as static. Thus, a "transition" with a clear beginning and ending is an inaccurate way to think about this experience.

The meaning of being transgender

A number of participants felt that their experience of being transgender had a higher purpose. Quinn shared, "This whole thing can also be considered some kind of gift, because how many people in their lifetime get to live as both genders?" Others felt that being transgender has a practical purpose, such as educating people about the complexities of sex and gender. Sara said:

> Sometimes I've thought maybe I should just make a decision, and just be a guy so it won't be a hassle. But then I think, no that's too much of a hassle. I think it just is good for people, if they don't know what gender I am. Because it just lets them know that there's not just male and female or black and white. There's always another story.

Stephanie shared a similar sentiment:

> I was put on the earth for a reason. And I think part of the reason that I'm here is to screw everybody's head up around how you should be in the world. And that there are no fast and hard lines. And it's good for the straight women to be attracted to me and then realize, "Oh my god, it's a woman, I could be attracted to a woman. Oh, and what does that mean?" What does that stir up in her? Or for the man in the pool hall getting upset because his girlfriend is checking me out, and he knows that I'm a woman. What does that do to him? And he wants to beat the shit out of me. . . . And the great thing is that I don't have to do a damn thing except be myself.

Creating a new story is challenging, and coming to understand one's own story in the absence of reflection and possibility is difficult. As a result, creating a new story is a very deliberate process. For example, Grady discussed that rather than adhering to the general protocol followed by others in his transgender support group, he is "making those changes on my own." For Karen, the lack of established steps in her process—of a clear end—is difficult, because she regularly feels misunderstood.

Most people do not even think about what their "story" is for gender and sexual orientation. Those out of the norm often do, especially GLB people. In contrast to sexual

orientation, where one discovers an aspect of self (attraction) and then applies the appropriate identity (gay, lesbian, bisexual), transgender people may first apply the label of transgender and subsequently begin the process of coming to understand what that means for them. Not knowing what the future will bring is challenging. As Quinn describes:

> [I am] making a transition from what I've always known, into just seeing myself as transgender and then figuring out, well, what does that mean? What changes do I want to make, or not want to make, to feel comfortable? What's comfortable being me? And sometimes, you can't see three or four or five steps down the road. You know, you can see, maybe the next one or two, and you'll take a step in that direction, and see how you feel and maybe you stop there.

The inherent instability of stories makes understanding one's own story infinitely more difficult. As Quinn describes, this identity is a process, with few guidelines about what is expected, outside of the dominant stories.

Beyond the inherent instability, the lack of an existing story with which to identify is a major impediment to understanding one's own. Though of course each person's identity is not a direct reflection of the dominant stories, neither are they unique. Therefore, having a place from which to begin is essential to develop an understanding of the self. As Quinn describes, "It really is up to us individually, as we go along, to figure this out. And I feel like a baby. I really feel like, two years into this, I'm really just beginning to understand what that means for me."

Sal says, "It's almost like we're creating a new gender . . . I think it's like a new group. But yet you want to create that so you can have an identity, so you can say, okay, this is who we are." In order to create this group however, the identity needs to expand from private to public. In the next section I discuss how the participants attempt to convey their stories to the rest of the world, despite the profound obstacles.

Conveying Stories

In this section I present data that demonstrate the range of efforts that transgender people in this study take to convey their identity to the rest of the world. Having responded to dominant stories and begun the process of continuously creating their own, how do these participants externalize their stories?

Gender attribution plays a major role in the identity construction and lived experiences of these participants. This interactive process works both to confirm and challenge the participants' sense of self. Most of the participants have come to realize that they cannot rely on gender attribution to affirm their story. Yet each acknowledged that they consider, and are often aware of, or made aware by others, their presentation. The desired attribution was different for each participant, and was rarely static. This process was confusing, as many struggled to "be seen."

Many participants faced the contradiction of wanting to be attributed a masculine gender, concurrent with the desire to be seen as transgender, which feels unattainable. For many, being perceived as male or masculine is affirming; for a few, it was just the opposite. While a particular attribution was more important for some than others, most acknowledged that a sense of being recognized felt enormously satisfying and validating. For some, this is a constant uphill battle. For example, Ezra said, "I know what I identify as, but it's just too much energy to start proving it to everybody every single day."

If Kessler and McKenna (1978) are correct in asserting that every interaction invokes gender attribution, then a gender will be attributed to transgender people, and it will usually be inaccurate. Further, attributions of sexual orientation complicate Kessler and McKenna's assertion, as people either "can't deal with dyke, so they see male," or

"people just see lesbian, they don't see trans." For this sample, being perceived as a lesbian often precluded a masculine gender attribution. This seemed particularly true for people who lived in gay and lesbian-savvy regions. Grady explained one connection between gender and sexual orientation attributions, "If people do perceive me as a woman, it's because they perceive that I'm a dyke." Several people explained that in their understanding of the situation, their being attributed a lesbian identity came from a place of respect. Kris explained, "In [my town], nobody passes. So people call me Ma'am. It's just sort of a camaraderie dyke thing. They're like, 'You're a dyke, that's nice.'" Alex, who lives in the same area, agreed, "It's really hard not to be seen as a lesbian." This conflation of gender and sexual orientation is typical and affirms the commonly held stereotypes of lesbians as masculine women.

Given the many misattributions, transgender people are in the position of either having to explain or otherwise convey their gender to other people, or move unrecognized throughout the world, which has its own difficulties. Indeed, there are persistent challenges to conveying a transgender identity. First, the world currently does not recognize this story. People are unfamiliar with this possibility, which makes it impossible for it to be recognized. Consequently, the distress of presenting as ambiguous or androgynous is taxing. Nathan described the pain and harassment he experienced and said, "I sort of gave in to the culture's idea of gender, and gave up my little gender revolution." Ezra said, "I'm having a very hard time living a practical life in this position. And I don't know whether it's worth it for me to continue to try to live in this particular space." These participants' experiences testify to the rigid hold of the gender binary in our culture. Rather than live in the "middle" or in an otherwise unrecognizable space,

these individuals feel forced to present as either male or female. Their words show how they are worn down by the expectation that they present a specific gender.

Perhaps due to this, those who are attributed a male gender much of the time stated that passing as male was simply easier than "correcting" people. Being attributed a masculine gender, especially in inconsequential situations such as stopping at a "Quicky Mart" made no difference in their lives, so it was not worth the energy it took to educate or challenge people. As Marg describes, "The store clerk at Price Chopper, it probably doesn't make a difference." On the other hand, depending on her energy that day, Karen describes how she sometimes uses the experience of being "Sirred" as an opportunity to educate the clerk about gender presentation:

> Sometimes I just ignore it or I respond and they are like, 'Oh my gosh, I'm really sorry.' And if my head is not somewhere else, I made a commitment that I will respond, 'Actually, I am a woman and women can look many different ways.'. . . I say it is understandable. Like, there is no chastising or anything.

As gender attribution reveals the stories that the external world perceives about transgender individuals, examining this process is a way to explore how the stories transgender people tell themselves conflict or correspond with the stories they tell the world. They come to rely on the gender attribution process to let them know what part, if any, of their story is "heard." Did I pass? Did that person see me as a woman or a man? The store clerk said "Thank you, sir!" For example, Nathan went to the Michigan Womyn's Music Festival, where men are prohibited, and found that that the festival-goers perceived him as male. He describes a scene:

> When I looked into their eyes, I could see the same fear that they had was the same fear I had, in some ways. I mean, not the same exact thing, but it was like the way that they were feeling, was the way I felt about being there. . . . Like, they didn't want any men there, this was their safe space. And I just wanted to be there. It wasn't about—I just wanted people to leave me alone.

This experience showed Nathan that gender attribution can supersede his own perception of himself, and that it would sometimes determine his feeling of safety. As he summed up, "I felt like in that situation it was more about what other people thought I was, than what I think I am.

Gender Attribution: Controlling it

Kessler and McKenna (1978) assert that once an attribution is made, anything subsequent to it is used to support it. Since gender attribution is inescapable, and the initial attribution is crucial, transgender people must adopt methods of influencing the process, if they are to be seen in satisfying ways. Though it is not always possible, being recognized, for these participants, means attempting to control or influence gender attribution. Some take intentional action in order to control the attribution though gender presentation. Bolin (1988) identified certain characteristics as crucial for passing: aspects of appearance, voice, demeanor, and the body. Indeed, the participants utilize a mix of tools to convey their identities, including the use of particular names, pronouns, clothing, behavior, and by concealing the body. Though Bolin's sample utilized "biographical editing" to rewrite their histories, these participants did not (p. 135).

Names[14]

Nine of the participants used their given names, and ten had taken on a new name that they felt better captured their self. Of the new names, none are feminine, and most are fairly gender-neutral. It is noteworthy that while many of the participants wanted to be seen as male, they didn't pick exceptionally masculine names. For example, if I wanted people to see me as a man, I might call myself John. Cleary, simply being seen as

a man is not the goal, challenging assumptions and attributions is. And for most, being seen as a typical biological male named John for instance, is also not the goal. As being transgender is a distinct identity, a sole attribution of man would not feel entirely accurate. Another explanation is that the participants know that being seen as someone named John might not be believable, while being seen as Ezra or Alex might. Sal's choice speaks to this, "I was trying to find something that fit and I don't feel like totally using a male name right now because I am, I'm so in between. And I feel Sal represents that in between- ness." As Lee explained about changing his name:

> It was also a little bit about coming out a little bit you know, not saying, "Hello world, I am transgender or whatever," but just being—baby steps—being more public about being somebody different than who they thought I was. It was starting to establish an individual space, a more individual space.

A name change is a tangible change that is presented to the rest of the world. Establishing an "individual space" is, as Lee states, a step towards expressing an identity different than that previously attributed to them.

Pronouns

There were a range of pronoun preferences among the participants. Three people said that either he or she felt comfortable, and one said that neither felt right. Only two people said that "she" felt truly appropriate. Ten participants said that they prefer masculine pronouns, or are moving toward using masculine pronouns more often in their lives. A few people mentioned gender-neutral pronouns, but only Stevi uses them regularly. By asserting their right to a preferred pronoun however, the participants are able to convey their gender identity—to a certain extent. After all, many of them wish there was a gender-neutral pronoun in common usage.

There were a variety of reasons why the ten participants preferred masculine pronouns. Several people just said, "It fits," or "It just feels right," meaning that it names or makes visible their internal feelings. Parallel to this is the feeling that masculine pronouns are appropriate, given their external presentation. For example, two of the people who pass as men most effortlessly—Marg and Nathan—said that to embody a male presentation in the world but use feminine pronouns would cause them everyday stress. On the other hand, three participants (Alex, Stevi, and Kris) said that they sometimes use gender-neutral pronouns as a way to come out, or "expose" their transgender identity to others. Besides actively projecting a transgender or masculine identity through pronouns, the participants utilize them to assess the reception of their presentation. This cue can help them evaluate situations for safety and comfort.

External Presentation

In addition to names and pronouns, external presentation of the body is a useful tool for controlling gender attribution. For example, a short men's haircut is essential. Ezra said, "That's the number one thing for me. Forget the packing, forget the binding and all that stuff. It's about my hair." Ev agreed, "The hair was the first thing to change. I went in there and said, 'Can you do men's hair? Can you do straight guy's hair?'" Indeed, all but two of the participants have very short hair. The other two have what might be considered a medium short style. Short hair alone would not be enough to indicate a masculine gender, as many women have short hair. Therefore, other measures must be taken to support this presentation.

While the body often "gave them away," it could also sometimes be used to relay a gender. The most common method (involving the body) used to influence gender

attribution is hiding the chest. Depending on chest size, binding one's breasts, or at least being conscious of how much they show, is common. Some use an Ace bandage or other type of binder to compress the breasts, while most depend on a tight sports bra and/or loose clothing. Because of its tautness, the "frog bra" is a popular kind. Wynn described the experience:

> I bind my chest every day, depending on how lazy I'm feeling—sometimes I'll just use a really tight sports bra and sometimes I'll use an Ace bandage and that's really an important part of my gender expression. . . . because I pass more when I'm binding and so I get that sense of being recognized more often because I think that people who maybe glance at my face and who aren't sure will then glance to my chest.

Wynn's words demonstrate his consciousness of how others make gender attributions based on his body, and that he is able to influence those attributions. Lee shared that while he identified more as androgynous, occasionally he wanted to present more male than usual:

> I might bind my chest down and just wear no makeup at all, and I might wear a hat or something, and maybe change my gait slightly. And I just project different energy…and I find that I do pass more when I go through those steps.

Lee identifies that while both the body and external appearance are central to gender attribution, behavior plays a role. Indeed, a number of participants pointed to "male behavior" when discussing their presentation. For example, when Ev first identified as transgender, he taught himself about how men act:

> How they sit, how they hold their hands, how they talk, walk, everything. Shake hands. Everything, I mean, there's a million different expressions of movement. And I've taught myself, I've learned them.

For Ev, who wanted to pass as a man, replicating men's behavior was crucial. This speaks to the power of culturally constructed norms and to the value of symbolic interaction as an explanatory theory. Particular behaviors are read as masculine,

especially when supported by visual clues. However, neither behavior, external appearance, or body presentation are individually enough to assure an attribution of man. Each is dependent on the other two.

Just as it is for female-to-male transsexuals (Bolin, 1988), for most female-bodied transgender people, the voice is a giveaway. Thus, managing it by lowering it or speaking minimally can help affect attribution. Ezra shared that when he is out in a men's bar, he tends to watch his voice, "Because my voice is telling; it's not low enough. And therefore, I tend not to say as much to bartenders, not chat as much. . . . Kind of drop it a little if I can, without being artificial." Indeed, the voice is a very challenging aspect of gender attribution, as there is little one can do to change it. For some people, the voice is a primary motivating factor for pursuing hormonal treatments.

Passing as a Man

As a general concept, "passing" is an expression often used by various communities to indicate being attributed an identity that one is not (Friedli, 1987). In transgender communities, passing is more likely to indicate being perceived for who one truly is. Kessler and McKenna (1978) assert that "everyone is engaged in passing" (p.126), as we each attempt to display our gender for others' recognition. Bolin (1988) states that "much of learning to pass is in the 'doing of gender' through interaction with an unknowing audience" (p. 136). As Cromwell (1999) describes it, passing is "blending in and becoming unnoticeable and unremarkable as either a man or a woman" (p. 39). Indeed, Boswell (1997) notes that passing "relieves society of its responsibility to recognize more than two genders" (p. 55).

In female-bodied or FTM transgender communities, there are variations on the concept of passing, but in general it means being perceived as male or as a man. Cromwell (1999) notes that there is an element of success when a transgender person passes. Cromwell distinguishes between mainstream discourses, in which passing is considered deceptive, and transdiscourses, when passing is considered closer to reality. Quinn's statement, "I think of it more as just being myself," echoes Cromwell's assertion that within FTM communities, passing is perceived as being seen for one's "true self" (p. 39). Ezra's comment that passing is "not as important as being who I am on the inside," represents a common sentiment among these participants. Accordingly, these participants do not feel they are being deceptive by manipulating gender attribution, but instead feel they are imparting a more accurate portrayal of who they are.

All of the participants had passed as men on occasion, sometimes when they were not expecting it or thinking about it. Some participants made more intentional efforts to control others' attributions to them by attempting to pass as a man. A domain analysis (Spradley, 1980) of the data shows that among these participants, there are reasons both to pass and not to pass. There are also obstacles that prevent passing and particular behaviors or techniques used in order to pass. Passing evokes particular feelings among this sample, and affects each individual in different ways.

The cultural associations of passing imply an element of intentionality, though some pass without consciously attempting to do so. For example, many of the participants were at times "misgendered" or "mistaken" for men, but this was not necessarily because of their intention to be perceived as such. Regardless of interest,

there was a real range of "ability" to pass. Some, such as Nathan, passed almost effortlessly, all the time. He said:

> The only time I don't pass is if I go somewhere and I just wear a T-shirt, and I wear a bra and people can see my breasts. I don't do that very often, just 'cause it makes it too hard.

Nathan's presentation is so masculine, that when people see his breasts, they are confused and project their discomfort onto him. For Nathan then, passing—including hiding his breasts—is a necessary aspect of moving through the world. Others, like Stevi, were unable to pass very often, even with intentional efforts. Their small size and feminine facial features act as marks of a master status (Goffman, 1959).

Participants identified particular situations or areas of the country as contexts in which they were more or less likely to pass. For example, Andrea noted that when she lived in an urban area, she was perceived as a man quite often, but that in other contexts, she is rarely seen as a man. Conversely, when traveling (separately) across country, especially in non-urban areas, both Kris and Alex regularly passed as young men or boys. Thus, we cannot assume either city or rural areas are dependable places to pass. Ev said that in certain places, such as gas stations or "guy places" like tire stores, he almost always gets "Sirred." Perhaps because women are perceived to be infrequent customers in these arenas, the default attribution is "guy" unless there are clear indications otherwise.

A more salient element may be the level of awareness of gay, lesbian, and bisexual communities. For example, because of the high visibility of lesbians, Kris and Alex each felt it almost impossible to pass as male in Western Massachusetts, where masculine women are regularly attributed a lesbian identity. Similarly, Grady attributed

his being perceived as lesbian (rather than as a man) to the gay-savviness of his home city.

The art of passing could be a dissertation in itself, as evidenced by the literature (Bolin, 1988; Feinberg, 1993; Garfinkle, 1967; Woodhouse, 1989), and anyone socialized in the United States is familiar with stereotypical male or female behavior and presentation. Transmen, who do not receive anticipatory socialization (Goffman, 1959) as boys or men, and who lack clear indicators of a male body such as facial hair, height, or a male build, have to figure out how to act like men in order to be perceived as men. While we could examine the particular techniques of passing, it is more interesting to consider the ongoing process of creating an image, which occurs in every interaction. As Kessler & McKenna (1978) assert, in order for one's gender to be seen as natural, it must not be seen as passing. Here, I focus on the meaning of passing's importance for these participants. The participants intentionally passed for a variety of reasons, including to feel recognized, to explore identity, and to feel safe.

Recognition

By far the most satisfying reason, many participants felt a sense of being seen for who they feel they really are when attributed a male gender (Cromwell, 1999). Wynn described the first time he passed, "It was just this thrill of someone recognized me—wow—someone recognized something that is under the surface." He also noted that those moments of recognition were "ruined" when people would "correct themselves in a hurry." Others felt "seen," "recognized," or "validated" when people perceived them as male. Grady named it as "very relieving to be seen that way, by someone else, other than myself." The attribution others offer can carry great weight—an attribution of identity.

While he enjoys being recognized, Wynn had mixed feelings about passing, as he identifies as transgender, rather than as a man. Thus, when he was perceived as a man, he felt he was being taken for something he was not. While passing as a man did not give him the satisfaction of being recognized as transgender, he valued it because he saw it as "the closest I can get to being perceived as trans." In a society where the categories of man and woman are the only recognized genders, being perceived as transgender is so far, unachievable, outside of transgender communities.

Exploring Identity

Besides validating an already established identity, passing helped participants explore a transgender identity and its distinct meaning for them. For example, Grady articulated how this process helped him realize his transgender identity:

> It's been this interesting process. . . . I kind of hit a new level; I can tell I'm passing, and I have to relax myself inside. And then I use those moments to catch up, or get used to, you know, not only being seen as a guy, but being a guy. So now I'm kind of past the place where I don't you know, feel ecstatic like, oh wow, I passed. So I don't even let myself feel that, cause yes, I mean, it's not passing now, cause that's who I am.

Grady is able to launch from being perceived as a guy to being a guy—from being attributed an identity to embodying it. By managing his gender presentation, and externally exploring what it felt like to be a man, Grady is able to develop and feel comfortable with his internal sense of identity. Grady's statement, "It's not passing now, cause that's who I am," demonstrates that passing is not experienced as deceptive; instead, it is more about presenting one's "true" self. River shared a somewhat similar experience of dealing with gender attribution, though her presentation was less intentional:

> All my life people perceived me as a guy, even if I felt like I looked feminine, you know. People often . . . read my energy as boy. And so a lot of [their] perception[s] . . . fed both my identity and my feelings and . . . I just created some space to be, to try on different ways of being.

Again, the experience of being attributed a masculine identity allowed River to explore that possibility for herself. Stephanie used interactions in which she was regarded as a man to begin to feel more comfortable being attributed a masculine identity. She said that she is working up to saying, "Either [pronoun] is fine," when someone is unclear about which gender to attribute to her. She seems to be using these situations to feel more comfortable and explore her transgender identity. For each of these participants, the process of interaction and the accompanying gender attribution encourages them to internalize the attributed identity.

Safety

As a matter of personal safety, some participants consciously choose to present as a man as a way of negotiating "gendered" situations, such as walking alone at night. They perceive it to be safer, and some actually feel safer. Referring back to her younger days, when she was regularly harassed on the street, Sara said, "Sometimes I do try to pass, in certain situations. . . . I don't want people to think I'm a chick walking down the street." Andrea described her realization that she was passing when she was walking alone at night in a city:

> I had just cut my hair and it was winter and so I had like, a sweatshirt and jacket and whatever, and I was walking down the street and I realized I was passing . . . I mean . . . they don't think I'm a girl, they're not gonna kick my ass. And like I can walk down here and it was sort of the safety factor was suddenly increased.

Kris discussed the relief passing brought, especially when he was traveling in rural areas:

> It's nice 'cause you're like, okay, at least for a split second, they're not gonna be on your case right away. You're like, "Phew." One little small battle won. I'm

> sure the next time I won't win it . . . but it's exciting that I don't get my face beat in.

So, in addition to the recognition or validation passing could bring, there was a utilitarian aspect of passing that in some ways protected people from being the object of negative attention. Beyond a feeling of validation, passing was sometimes a necessary aspect of life, and sometimes brought a sense of freedom that female-bodied people rarely feel in these contexts.

Not passing

While passing often brought freedom, satisfaction, or a sense of being recognized, there were downsides to passing, and specific reasons not to pass. While a few participants felt strongly that they are men in the making, most of the participants identified more fully with a transgender identity. Therefore, feeling recognized as a man did not necessarily validate their gender identity. Others felt that not passing as a man was a way to help educate people that the concept of woman would need to stretch to include them. Lastly, just as passing was an important safety mechanism, it also set off secondary safety issues, as the participants added being "read" to their concerns (Bolin, 1988).

Erasing Identity

Ironically, just as passing can bring a sense of validation and recognition, passing can bring a feeling of *not* being recognized. Those who felt male and identified as men felt comfortable with being perceived as male. But those who identified as transgender, rather than male, identified passing as problematic.

Being transgender in a society where gender attribution includes only man and woman is difficult. Being perceived as a woman does not feel accurate, yet neither does

being perceived as a man. Since few of the participants experienced full-time passing, most were able to enjoy the sense of passing as male to counterbalance the more common attribution of female. Yet, few participants desired to pass full-time, and if they did desire this, it was not without complication, as being perceived as a man invalidated or made invisible their trans identity. Wynn articulated this difficulty when he said that living as a man (passing full-time) did not appeal to him, because "then I've just moved from one box into the other, and that's not—neither of the boxes are home for me." As Alex stated, "I don't really want to blend in." Trey explained, "I don't want to be invisible as a trans person." Depending on the situation, those who were often perceived as male sometimes had to overtly identify as transgender. Marg explained, "There are times when I go out of my way to say, 'Yeah, I'm a transgender guy,' . . . when I want to be clear and from the beginning be authentic with who I am." These participants value the idea that their identity is a challenge to the gender binary. This makes passing problematic, as Wynn points out, since moving from "one box to the other" seemingly supports the binary. Passing adds to the invisibility of transgender identity, though there are satisfying aspects about it.

Erasing the past

A few participants identified another reason for not passing full-time: being seen as a male erased their female history, which many feel is an important part of who they are. Trey related his feelings about passing to his ongoing decision about whether to take "T." He said, "I don't want to deny my past." Disregarding his past experience as a girl would erase an important part of his current identity. Andrea shared a similar sentiment, "I had a girlhood; I grew up as one. And it was wretched really. But I still had that. And I

don't want to say that I didn't have that." As she describes it, Andrea says that her past is "a huge part of the way that I think and the way that I am."

When discussing his thought process on whether to transition to a male body, Ev shared his understanding of some female-to-male transsexuals who, he says, are "in a different type of closet." He says they are hiding "by not talking about the fact that they are in fact transmen. And having to pass as men, genetic men, which is not true." As was traditionally encouraged in the clinical model, some FTM transsexuals do feel a need to hide their past (Bolin, 1988). Increasing numbers of FTMs, however, are open about their female childhood (Cromwell, 1999). Pursuing surgery or hormones, Ev stated, wouldn't change the fact that he's a transman. "We're not gonna be happy just going into the two gender box closet. We want to say, 'We're transsexuals, we're transgendered men.' We don't want to say, most of us don't want to say, 'We're just another guy, a genetic guy.'" For Ev, being transgender is about claiming this as a valid identity, rather than a process one moves through in order to become a man.

Challenging others

Along with remaining visible and acknowledging a female past, not passing as a man allowed the participants to actively challenge the binary gender system. As Ezra shared:

> Passing to me . . . indicates that you are somehow following something . . . that says, "This is what male is, and this is what male looks like." And a lot of times, passing involves doing things that are extremely stereotypically make. . . . And, that might not be who I am. I could do that, and you'd be clearer about my gender, but you wouldn't be clearer about me.

Despite the difficulties, Ezra has chosen to continue to attempt to project a trans image, rather than a specifically male presentation. As it would erase his true identity, Ezra takes

the opportunity to come out as transgender in order to challenge people's assumptions about the gender possibilities. Stephanie, who says she passes as a man mostly when she is traveling or in a city, shared that her reactions to passing ranged from

> mild irritation on a bad day to amusing on a good day. . . . And what I find interesting is when they catch themselves and realize that I'm not [a man]. Just watch them go through their discomfort. So it's kind of turned around. And I don't have to absorb it anymore. . . . I don't say anything; I just let them sit with it, which is kind of fun.

Safety

Although passing was sometimes viewed as a safer option than challenging or being seen as a woman, one reason not to do so would be the risk of being "read" after passing. Kris gave an example of a time when he was seen as a boy, and later was identified as female-bodied, which provoked an angry response. He explained:

> I can pass sometimes . . . but it's constantly a challenge, because you pass for a second and then you don't. . . . People call me young man sometimes. It initially feels fine and good. It's the what comes after it—like, what are they gonna see after this?

Ev also mentioned that while he preferred being "Sirred," he always worried about "being read," and the ensuing consequences, which are unpredictable. River echoed these experiences, describing a typical encounter in the grocery store, "It can be real scary, because they might check me out, but at some point they might realize that I'm a woman and that might freak them the fuck out and then like . . . anything is possible."

Grady has occasionally had to purposefully expose his femaleness in order to influence others' reactions to him. In women's bathrooms, Grady said he will "make shifts in my body to let them know I'm a woman." Grady is able to use his body to project a gender in order to diffuse a potential conflict. Successful passing is safe, but

unsuccessful passing is not. Lacking a guarantee, participants must weigh their options and risk their safety in each situation.

The Body

What is the role of the body in conveying stories? Though (except for one) these participants do not identify as transsexual, the body is nevertheless a central aspect of their transgender story. As Gagne and Tewksbury (1998) argue, gender is announced through the body. These participants generally found no way around this. The world sees man and woman, and thus attributes male and female. For female-bodied people who do not necessarily want to be seen as female, the body is a potentially discrediting stigma (Goffman, 1963). Despite external tools such as clothes, hair, and behavior, many continued to be attributed a female identity. As Stevi said:

> It's sort of disappointing. I wish people could see past my breasts. And even if I'm wearing a baggy shirt and look for all the world like I'm a boy from the neck down, I don't have a boy's face I guess, and I definitely don't have a boy's voice.

As breasts are the "daily visible and tangible signifier" of womanliness and women's femininity (Young, 1998, p. 125), Stevi's breasts give hir away. Due to this signifier, some participants feel compelled to change their bodies in order to preclude a feminine attribution. For example, Ezra articulates the deep connection between identity and attribution, "One of the main reasons for me transitioning [is] not just to look like what I want, but [because of] the fact that I can't walk around in this society the way I want to be perceived." In other words, Ezra wants to change his body in order to be perceived as male. This is the extent to which Ezra considers going in order to reject a feminine attribution, even though he is not entirely sure he desires a masculine attribution.

Alex came up against this when he described the dilemma of changing his body to present a more masculine appearance. He said, "It will make my body align with who I feel I am. But then again, I might be seen as a male full-time, and that is not who I am." While changing his body might work for him, he also realizes that his body will then "announce" a gender that he does not necessarily identify with. Trey shared a similar sentiment, "I don't know how to keep—I don't know how to have—make the changes that I want to make myself happy, when at the same time make sure that people recognize my identity." This was a feeling a number of people expressed—that they might change their body to what feels right, but that is not the same as changing their body to become a man. For example, Gretchen would like to take "T" for the physical changes it would bring, but does not want to be a man, nor be perceived as a man. Andrea would like to have chest reconstruction, but knows that likely outcome would include passing as male, and that is not necessarily her goal. As the body's influence on attribution remained out of their control, these participants made difficult choices between their desire to change their bodies and the risk of being misgendered. They could not find a way to allow their bodies to represent their internal feelings without representing what feels like an inauthentic identity to the world. This link is significant—even the most personal decisions are in a way, taken out of their hands, as they simply cannot control how the world will interpret their body and therefore, their gender.

Wynn stated:

> I have a lot of ambivalent feelings about passing because I don't identify as male or a man, and part of the reason I don't want to go on "T" [testosterone] is that I don't want to wake up one day and find that I'm a white man.

Wynn's reference to being a "white man" is especially noteworthy. As transgender-identified people, these participants are in a minority group often targeted by hate crimes and oppression. For white participants, passing as a man erases this targeted identity and supplants it with the most dominant identity in US society. The paradigm shift seems too much, as a number of participants identified this outcome as a major reason for not passing and not transitioning. Like gay, lesbian, and bisexual people who come to identify with being part of an oppressed minority, these participants seem to value this identity, despite its difficulties.

The body and the self

Several theorists (Featherstone, 1991; Shilling, 1993) privilege the body as a central and primary aspect of the self. Devor (1993) found that female-to-male transsexuals view the private body as less important than public attribution. The body does represent us in the world; thus, the body and the self are interactive. Consequently, the effects of the visibility of one's body occur in the public sphere as well as in the private world. Though the body is inescapable, its importance varies for each participant.

For a few participants, dissatisfaction with their body is primarily a private matter. For example, Ev shared that his body is the only thing that reminds him that he is a transman, so he makes sure to hide his body, even from himself. He said:

> Nobody sees me naked. I don't even see me naked. I look at myself in the mirror for less than a minute, just to make sure that I'm not gaining too much weight. And then after that, I look at myself quite a lot when I have my clothes on.

In contrast to how his body challenges his sense of his gender, creating an external presentation through clothing, even when alone, affirms Ev's sense of gender identity. For Calvin, it is a solitary experience of dissatisfaction:

> Because I almost feel like, I don't care how the world receives me . . . . it's how I feel with myself alone, in my sexuality, naked, at home alone, by myself. That's where this matters most to me. . . . it's about trying to have my body line up with how it looks in my brain.

Perhaps because the body's importance decreases when it does not express accurately our sense of self, some of these participants downplay the importance of the body. Ev relies on his outer expression (his clothes) to convey his identity:

> What's important to me is the inside of me, and the clothes. The female physiology that I have, although I love and take care of my body very well, I'm a vegetarian, I value my health, but the anatomy and the details of it, the way that it looks, that it's very female, it's almost irrelevant to me, to who I am.

As there are many reasons why people identify as transgender, there are of course difference experiences of the body. Each of the participants had complex, mixed feelings about their bodies, and a majority expressed some discomfort with their bodies. It is impossible to know whether their body discomfort contributes to their feeling of being transgender, or if their initial feelings of being transgender caused their body discomfort, or even whether there is even a causal relationship.

In contrast to Calvin, who experiences his dissatisfaction as a private issue, for many of the participants, the desire for a different body has very much to do with how people perceive their external presentation. For example, Sara said, "I'm a totally different person without my shirt on." Nathan shared that he felt "more female" when he did not have a shirt on. Just as Young (1998) asks women, "What would a positive experience of ourselves as breasted be in the absence of the male gaze?" (p. 129), how would transgender people experience their breasts if breasts were not a signifier of femaleness? For Sara and Nathan, a heightened awareness of one's breasts compels a feminine attribution even from themselves. Ezra said that even binding his breasts can

provoke this feeling, as giving so much attention to his chest reminds him that he has a female body.

Conclusion

Transgender people are in the paradoxical position of simultaneously challenging gender norms and "passing," whether intentionally or not. The importance and significance of gender attribution varied among the sample based on personal feelings and identity development. For example, a number of people said that passing had been especially important when first exploring a trans identity, but that it had come to have less significance as they grew comfortable and had greater understanding of their transgender identity. Trey shared a common sentiment, "It's a weird contradiction, because I want to be recognized as a trans guy but then whenever I pass, I'm like YES!" For many, the recognition is often worth the fact that passing makes their trans identity invisible, especially since it is not a consistent occurrence. For some, passing safely, full-time, without worry about being read, would be ideal. For others, a gender attribution of transgender would be ideal. Since this is currently not an option, being seen as male—sometimes—feels validating.

Another considerable challenge in embodying a transgender identity is the lack of reflection of one's identity in other people. Unlike men and women, who see themselves reflected in family members and the rest of the world, they very rarely see themselves in other people. That lack of identification has a significant affect on people. For Ezra, part of the problem is being unable to concisely name his own identity—even to himself. This makes it especially difficult to explain it to other people. He explains:

> I'd like to know who I am finally. I'd like to have something, some stability. Also I feel like, for relationships, it's kind of nice to be able to say to somebody, this is the package that you're getting, whatever that may be. Even if it's genderqueer, I'm going to go all over the gender spectrum every single day that we're out. At least you can give the person a map of what's gonna happen.

Stevi said, "It's inconvenient not to have a gender id that I can explain in one or two words." Karen explained that it is hard not having an "end" that she's working towards, like transsexuals, "It is definitely tiring to have to constantly define and explain yourself." Ultimately, transgender people are faced with the fact that their identity is generally not recognized, they almost never see themselves reflected—or hear their story—in other people, and they must be deliberate about communicating their identity.

CHAPTER 6

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

In chapters four and five, I presented representative profiles of some of the participants in this study, and some of the major themes among the data. In this chapter, I conclude the dissertation with some final thoughts, implications, and suggestions for future research.

The Experience of Transgender Identity

In this dissertation I investigated three major research areas. First, I explored why and how female-bodied people identify as transgender. Secondly, I explored how they understand their transgender identity, and third, I explicated the ways that female-bodied transgender-identified people manage and make their gender identity known.

Jackson and Scott (2001) assert that experience is interpreted, theorized and mediated through the cultural meanings available. For individuals whose gender identity falls outside culturally recognized boundaries, transgender identity is a necessary implication. As an umbrella identity, transgender captures a variety of experiences. By profiling a number of experiences, and identifying the ways in which these individuals have responded to the available cultural stories and begun to create their own, I have uncovered some of the complexities and contradictions implicated in claiming a transgender identity in these times.

As a social justice educator and as someone who supports individual identity definition, I support and validate individual perspectives on identity. While each individual's lived experience is valid, and each individual's understanding of that lived experience is legitimate, these are also situated experiences. As Lorber (1994) argues,

gender is a "social institution" (p. 15) from which none of us are exempt. Therefore, while an individual can claim to be "off that spectrum entirely" in their personal understanding of their own gender, they cannot successfully renegotiate gender at the individual level (Gagne & Tewksbury, 1998). As Lucal (1999) recognized, one cannot choose not to participate in the system of gender. Transgender people certainly recognize the role of gender attribution, which is one aspect of what Lucal is identifying. Knowing that they cannot escape gender attribution, the participants acknowledge utilizing gender attribution in ways that satisfy them. At the very least, they attempt to play an active role in the gender attribution process.

If, like other stories, transgender stories have a "motivational plot" (Plummer, 1995), the plot may be summed best by Boswell (1998):

> So, is transgender simply a result of being more honest with oneself and resistant to socialization, or is it chromosomally or hormonally induced, or better described as a spirit taking precedence over form? All we know is that we can no longer live any other way, and so we move and discover many others who share our experience. (p. 56)

The participants in this study attribute their transgender identity to restrictive gendered expectations; the aspects of social interaction, including gender attribution and presentation, are primary motifs of the experience. The process of presenting a self to the social world and the reactions that presentation provokes are central. At the same time, some participants allude to internal, physiological bases, and a few participants feel transgender identity to be an individual experience. For example, Calvin wishes he could change his body without the knowledge or reaction of the external world. Changing his body is for his own sense of "rightness" in his body, rather than for presenting his "true

self." At the same time however, Calvin acknowledges that his sense of discomfort with his body is exacerbated by an external gaze.

A few participants are clear that their desire is to be a man, and many more desire to present as a masculine person. In the end, however, the majority of participants feel, as Boswell (1998) articulates, that they are simply being themselves, and they seek to share that self with the world. For example, Gretchen states:

> I am just Gretchen at this point. You know, you can label me with whatever label you feel necessary to put on me, because that is your trip. I don't really have a label for myself. They all fit and none of them fit.

Though some may eventually pursue physical changes and present as a man full-time, the participants in this study do not perceive transition as the end goal. Instead, gender is an everyday experience, one in which they are continually expressing, changing, and experiencing themselves as a gendered person. As transgender encompasses a broad spectrum of identities and is characterized by loose boundaries, participants are able to claim it without feeling boxed into any particular stagnant identity.

Nevertheless, the binary has limited and in essence created a transgender identity. As we cannot escape the influence of the dominant institutions, any understanding of our selves is dependent (even if to reject) on the current dominant cultural paradigms (Guess, 1997). Blackwood (1999), in her fieldwork in West Sumatra, demonstrated that gender transgression is necessarily dependent on the cultural expectations of gender. Thus, while these participants desire to escape the cultural limitations of the gender binary, they are at the same time bound to them. Though the space between genders represents lives "reconciled to gender queerness" (Halberstam, 1998, p. 170), woman and man

nonetheless demarcate the boundaries. The cultural constructs of femininity and masculinity are important tools for social control (Johnson, 1997). Further, using gender to define the core of what makes us human creates dependence on dichotomizing gender and on seeing men and women as fundamentally different (Johnson, 1997).

The conditions

The diversity and variety of transgender stories presented here suggest that the current cultural conditions are amenable to multiple emerging stories. As gender is a process, rather than a stable identity, the meanings associated with and created by gendered experiences necessarily change over time. The fact that a growing number of people claim a transgender identity demonstrates that gender identity has an important role for individuals, and that a social identity, whether it be man, woman, or transgender, has a place in our culture. Regardless of how each individual defines their transgender identity, having this identity—transgender—is vital.

There are contributing factors specific to these times that support this heterogeneity. For example, in recent years, gender roles and traditional restrictions of gender have been challenged more than ever before. With the acceptance of the idea that gender is a social construction, that what we consider feminine and masculine/man and woman, is not connected innately to the physical body, the conditions became conducive for people to question the construction of the entire category of gender. Additionally, the increasing availability of language to describe gender fluidity has allowed individuals to name new identities.

For decades, clinicians suppressed and segregated transgender feelings into the categories of heterosexual transvestitism or transsexualism (Bolin, 1988; Denny, 1992),

and the medical establishment's perspective dominated clinical and public understanding of this "condition." This story included early childhood feelings of one's sex being inappropriate, gender dysphoria in adulthood, a feeling that one was "trapped in the wrong body," and disgust with one's genitals (Walworth, 1997). Rather than recognizing a range of gender experiences, clinicians viewed transsexual people as homogeneous (Denny, 1992). In contrast, in postmodern times the voices of authority are "fracturing in the face of participant stories"(Plummer, 1995, p. 133). Correspondingly, rather than holding sole authority, the medical model simply becomes one perspective among many equally valid stories. As social constructionist and postmodern perspectives have added further possibilities for understanding this experience, transgender stories have begun to be known and more widespread (Bolin, 1997).

The availability of the internet has had a significant effect on stigmatized populations, especially among transgender people (Bornstein, 1994; Denny, 1997; Nakamura, 1997). This dissertation supports the idea that the internet has brought together a transgender virtual community, as almost all participants volunteered to participate after hearing about the study via an on-line listserve. The internet makes transgender stories far more available to people who seek them out (and even those who don't). Nakamura (1997) asserts that transsexual autobiographies posted on-line serve to "introduce newcomers to the rest of the community" (p. 75). The internet availability of transgender stories can help people gain a sense of community, support, and decreased isolation, without even leaving the house (E. Shapiro, 2002). There is little risk involved by posting one's own story or opinions on the web. Those exploring transgender identity may find multiple, multilayered stories, in contrast to whatever local narratives they may

encounter (Nakamura, 1997). The anonymity available in a computer screen name allows people to expose themselves in ways that might be too risky outside the cyber world. People can gain "practice" telling their stories before going truly public.

Just as it has affected other social movements and communities, the mass media has played a significant role in creating an environment open to transgender stories. People with stigmatized identities search for societal and textual narratives, scanning for reflections of themselves (Plummer, 1995). In particular, the 1999 film *Boys Don't Cry* (Pierce & Bienen, 1999), for which Hilary Swank won an Academy Award, brought a powerful transgender story to the attention of the general public. Indeed, several participants named this film as having a significant impact on the development of their transgender identity. Additionally, the many books that have reached fairly widespread audiences—assigned in women's studies classes for example—have yielded a range of examples of transgender stories. Jess's story in *Stone Butch Blues* (Feinberg, 1993) demonstrated the fluidity and multi-leveled problems associated with gender variance, and connected gender with butch-femme sexualities of the 1950s. Kate Bornstein's books *Gender Outlaw* (1994) and *My Gender Workbook* (1998) encouraged people to craft their own gender stories. In Feinberg's (1996) later work, *Transgender Warriors*, s/he interspersed hir own story of coming to understand hir gender identity with historical examples of transgender experiences, demonstrating a connection to the past. This recognition of the past allows others to realize that their experience is in some ways, not unique. These and other texts offer hope to those exploring transgender identity because, as Plummer (1995) contends, "We consume stories in order to produce our own" (p. 43). The stories within this dissertation add to those already available.

Implications for Schools

As gender roles have more permeable boundaries than ever before, and gendered expectations for appearance and behaviors have become less restrictive, young people are exploring gender expression in ways that previous generations could not (Brink, 2002; T. Shapiro, 2002). As transgender becomes a more commonly claimed identity, issues pertaining to it become more culturally relevant. Educational systems will not be immune to the shifts in gender identity, and will need to be prepared to address issues that will challenge transgender youth, teachers, administrators, and parents.

Educational contexts are a primary arena in which children learn gendered roles and expectations. By elementary school, peers regularly enforce gender roles through harassment (Rofes, 1995), and homophobia is primary in these interactions (Bochenek, 2001). Boys and young men are especially susceptible to and invested in performing homophobia (Nayak & Kehily, 1997).

Non-normative gender expression is not new; there have always been students who push the edge of gender boundaries. What is new, however, is that the concept and identity of transgender is culturally available like never before. Though none of the participants in this study had identified per se as transgender in high school, most were aware of feeling differently-gendered at an early age. Increasingly, young people, especially high school-aged youth, are exploring what it means to be transgender or "genderqueer" (Biewald, 2002; Maurer, 2002). Just as GLB youth now "come out" at a younger age than previous generations, gender-variant youth are able to claim a transgender identity as early as middle or high school (Bochenek, 2001). Even if the

identity is not claimed, transgender expression is on the rise (Brink, 2002; Mallon, 1999; Pazos, 1999; Pfeiffer & Daniel, 2000; T. Shapiro, 2002).

Beyond recognizing and addressing the gender dynamics between boys and girls, educators need to recognize and value gender diversity. As we are all socialized to be uncomfortable with gender variance, it is important for teachers to reflect on their reactions to different gender expressions. How will educators react to, and address the issues that affect transgender youth in school settings? Are education professionals willing to educate themselves about the myriad issues accompanying non-normative gender expression? What responsibilities are school administrators willing to shoulder to support transgender-identified youth? Can educators take seriously and speak out against gender oppression, as they do for racism and sexism? Educators must examine how they contribute to restrictive gender roles and ask themselves, "Do I stifle non-normative gender expression in my classroom?" Truly inclusive classrooms will allow for, and support a range of gender expression.

Future Research

Advances in gender theory and queer studies have deepened our understanding of gender, and stimulated interest among academics. However, the lack of empirical research, especially with female-bodied non-transitioning participants, commands attention. Only by linking experience and theory can we truly advance the field. As transgender studies is a relatively new field, future research can explore a variety of areas.

Longitudinal studies

It is important to begin longitudinal studies of those exploring transgender identity. Follow-up interviews with these participants, for example, would yield valuable and insightful information about the mutability of transgender identity, as well as the long-term process of maintaining a transgender identity. Some of these participants will likely physically and socially transition to a man identity. How might their experiences differ from those who continue to identify as non-transitioning, female-bodied, and transgender? For what reasons might some of these participants eventually transition? Secondly, reflections from those who have moved through a variety of ways of understanding their identity would add valuable insight to the transgender coming out process. What are the long-term effects of maintaining a non-normative gender presentation? How will the existence of transgender identity impact those who continue to identify as men and women?

Sexuality

An important area of research that has yet to be explored is sexuality and its importance in understanding, experiencing, and conveying transgender identity. A few participants addressed sexuality as a key aspect of understanding of their identity. It is unclear whether more participants would have discussed sexuality, given the rapport necessary for this topic. However, it seems clear that for at least some female-bodied transgender-identified people, sexuality is an arena in which identity is both discovered and performed. For example, Ezra first began thinking about transgender issues in his fantasy life, and it was in sexual interactions with partners that it "got real" for River. Further, Stephanie explained that her transgender identity is directly related to her

sexuality and her sex drive, "There's pieces of me, like sexually I feel very male, like extremely male." Further research is necessary to explore what a transgender person means by feeling "male" in his or her sexuality. What does it mean to explore male sexuality with a female body? Empirical studies of transgender sexuality are necessary to help understand the connections between the body, gender identity, and sexuality.

Genderqueer

As described in chapter four, genderqueer is an identity that is largely embraced by youth (Biewald, 2002; Link, 2002; Maurer, 2002). Though a recent text addresses the complexities of this umbrella term (Nestle et al., 2002), there is currently no empirical research on the importance or meaning of genderqueer identity. Just as youth have established "queer" identity as distinct from gay, lesbian, and bisexual identity, genderqueer is a revolutionary reclaiming of the intersections of gender and sexual orientation.

A year after his initial interview, 32-year-old Ezra identifies as genderqueer, but feels uncomfortable revealing this identity to the transgender community. Because of its association with youth, Ezra says, being genderqueer is not viewed as a "valid" identity for people over college age. Research with those of all ages who claim a genderqueer identity would reveal the complexities of this identity.

If conference attendance is any indication, the overwhelming majority of those identifying as genderqueer are female-bodied. Why might female-bodied people be more apt to choose genderqueer, or a non-transitioning transgender identity, than male-bodied people? There are numerous ostensible reasons for this. For example, it may be difficult for a male-bodied person to establish this identity, due to the widely recognized narrative

of male-to-female transsexual, or transvestite. Secondly, surgery for male-to-female transsexuals is more readily available, so a genderqueer identity is perhaps less necessary. This implicates the lack of access to male physicality in the establishment of genderqueer identity for female-bodied people.

Racializing Transgender Identity

The majority of participants in this research are white. Though transgender is not a solely white identity, like gay and lesbian identity, the majority of visible faces in the communities are white. There are transgender people of color in leadership positions in national organizations, as well as activists, writers, and political leaders. However, research with transgender populations has highlighted primarily white experiences. The intersections of multiple identities, including race and class, are a rich area in which researchers can explore the construction of multiple marginalized identities.

The identity and community issues of bi- and multiracial, African American, Latino, Asian, and Native American transgender people are undoubtedly divergent from white transgender people. Research specific to these populations would yield understanding and ideas about the supports necessary for these communities.

It is worth noting that several 2002 murders of transgender people were youth of color (Fahrenthold, 2002; Heredia, 2002). Clearly, this is an issue of life and death for these marginalized youth. As youth-oriented social service and support organizations form in urban and suburban areas, they must be attentive to youth outside gender norms.

The Future of Transgender

Identity is a social construct; it is conceived as being dependent on "limits and borders, belonging and not belonging, and inclusion/exclusion" (Harding, 1998, p. 49). Fuss (1991) maintains that we are at once inside and outside identity. Butler (1990) submits that any identity category seeks to contain and control what it claims to describe. For example, masculinity is generally viewed in opposition to femininity. It is the transgression of borders therefore, that defines those borders. Accordingly, it is via the transgression of gender that masculinity and femininity are maintained.

When any identity is essentialized, it is placed outside of cultural and historical processes and rendered impermanent and immutable (Harding, 1998, p. 51). It is possible that transgender will become an established identity in line with man and woman. If this occurs, it is also likely that transgender will be reified in similar ways. Given this, transgender-identified people may then feel the need "maintain standards of behavior which [they do] not personally believe in, maintaining these standards because of a lively belief that an unseen audience is present who will punish deviations from these standards" (Goffman, 1959, p. 81).

As Kessler & McKenna (1978) and West and Zimmerman (1987) pointed out, neither the initial sex assignment, nor the actual existence of particular genitalia has much to do with how we categorize people by sex in everyday life; we simply operate with the certainty of a world of two sexes. We take it for granted that gender presentation and sex are congruent. Only when one's presentation is faulty do we look for secondary sex characteristics to assist our assessment. How will these assumptions change, as transgender people gain more visibility?

It will be important and fascinating to document the changes in transgender identity, as well as the effects on our culture, as the language and ideas we use to understand this experience develop and become accessible. For example, as young people become familiar with the concept of transgender, will more and more of them claim it? As transgender becomes further established as an umbrella term, will subgroups under this broader identity distinguish themselves further? Through what processes will developing emic language make its way into popular culture, if at all? What impact will the many transgender stories have? As non-transitioning stories become more culturally available, will the number of transitioning transsexuals decrease?

Conclusion

While transgender people cannot claim immunity to the gender binary, there are clear efforts to sustain an ongoing dialogue about the meaning of gender. In essence, they embody the vision put forth by Kessler and McKenna (1978) of a society free of the "biological imperative of gender," and where "gender membership is based on gender identity, rather than genitals" (p. 121).

As Plummer (1995) points out, there are stories yet imagined. While the concept of identity is fluid and mutable, it is also something many people value in their lives. Being able to name and claim ourselves is empowering (Guess, 1997). The emergence of transgender stories underscores the opportunity for individuals to make sense of themselves in ways that reject the dichotomous construction of gender. The cultural conditions encouraging transgender people to tell their stories are clearly amenable to diversity. In a nation almost defined by homogeny and standardization, it is remarkable that such diversity can be expressed and heard.

APPENDIX A

CALL FOR PARTICIPANTS

Are you female-bodied? Do you identify as transgender? Would you like to talk about your experiences?

Seeking female-bodied people who identify as transgender for dissertation research.

As a doctoral student in Social Justice Education at University of Massachusetts, I am conducting interviews for the purpose of gathering data about individuals who were born with female sex characteristics (female bodies), but feel that the label of female or woman does not fully or accurately describe their sense of self.

To participate, you must have been born female, currently identify as transgender, and not have completed transition to becoming male. Those who have not pursued and do not intend to pursue physical changes to their bodies are especially encouraged to participate. I am looking for individuals with a variety of identities, including gender, sexuality, class, ethnicity, race, and age.

Examples of interview questions include: How did you come to identify as transgender? What does being transgender mean to you? How does being transgender affect your daily experiences?
How do you respond to others' reactions to your gender presentation?

These discussions will be audio-recorded and transcribed for use in research about female-bodied transgender people. All participants are asked to sign a consent form, acknowledging that their participation in this interview is willing. All discussions will be completely confidential, and the names of participants will be not be associated with any writing that may come of this research.

For more information or to volunteer, contact:

Linda McCarthy
Phone: 413-323-9872
Email: lamc@educ.umass.edu

Information about researcher: As a doctoral student in Social Justice Education at University of Massachusetts, my research interests focus on female bodied transgender identities. This data will be the basis of my dissertation and possibly for used for publication. I identify as a lesbian and as an ally to transgender people.

APPENDIX B

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to study the experiences of female-bodied transgender individuals. The data gathered for this research will be analyzed by the primary and sole researcher Linda McCarthy, for the purpose of a qualitative study on female-bodied transgender people.

DESCRIPTION: If you agree to participate in an individual in-depth interview, you consent to a 1½ - 2 hour discussion in which you will be asked about your experiences as someone who identifies as transgender.

Please read the following statements and respond as to whether or not you are willing to participate:

1. I understand that the use of human subjects in this project has been approved by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Human Subjects Review Committee.
2. I understand the scope, aim, and purpose of this research project and the procedures to be followed and the expected duration of my participation.
3. I understand that the foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with my participation in this project may include discussion of topics that may be uncomfortable to me personally, and a need to further discuss these issues with peers after the interview.
4. I understand that the potential benefits that may be accrued from this research include personal discussion of issues relevant to me, possible insights into my own and others' experiences, and the opportunity to contribute to the construction of information about transgender identities.
5. I understand that the confidentiality of all recordings and transcripts from the interview, or any other records associated with my participation in this research, as well as my identity, will be fully maintained. I agree to being tape-recorded and realize that no one other than the researcher will know my identity. I understand that the written transcript of the interview will not be identified with my name, and that a pseudonym will be used to identify me in all written work. I understand that the audio tape of the interview will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.
6. I understand that although I have the right to review the transcript of my interview for the purpose of rephrasing or refining my own words, the researcher retains final judgment of what to include in the data.
7. I understand that my consent to participate in this research is entirely voluntary, and that my refusal will involve no prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I would otherwise be entitled.
8. I further understand that if I consent to participate, I may discontinue my participation at any time.
9. I confirm that no coercion of any kind was used in seeking my participation in this research.
10. I understand that if I have any questions pertaining to this research, I have the right to call Linda McCarthy (413-323-9872) or her project advisor Dr. Pat Griffin (413-545-0211) in order to discuss my concerns in confidence. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Institutional Research (413-545-0941) to discuss my concerns.
11. I will realize that I will not be provided with any financial incentive for my participation.
12. I understand that a summary of the researcher's interpretation of the data will be provided to me at the conclusion of the study, if I request this information.

I, _____ Consent/Agree to participate in this research.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C

INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

1. Welcome and thank you for coming. Introduce self.
2. Complete Identity sheet (clarify social identities)
3. Explanation of purpose and procedure. Answer questions.

Topic Areas:

General

How do you define transgender? Who does that label include?
How did you come to identify as transgender? (describe process)
What does being transgender mean to you?
How do you make sense of your gender identity?
How does being transgender affect your daily experiences?
How is being transgender different from other identities?
What are some typical ways that people respond to your gender presentation?
How do you react to their reactions?
Do you ever make accommodations or adjustments in your gender presentation? When? Why?
Describe a time when you felt really recognized as a transgender person.

Masculinity

What role does masculinity play in your gender identity?
What do you perceive masculinity to be? What aspects of it do you enjoy? Are there any aspects of it that you consciously choose to reject?

Body

How do you feel about your female body?
How do those feelings affect your identity as someone who identifies as transgender?
If you could transform your body to the "ideal" body, what would it look like?
How do you use external appearance to represent your gender? (clothing, hair, etc.)
Do you think about physically altering your body? If so, how?

Sexual orientation

Tell me about how your sexual orientation interacts or affects your identity as transgender.
What kind of body or person are you attracted to? How do you think this impacts, or is impacted by, your identity as a transgender person?
If you have a partner, how does your identity as a transgender person affect your relations?

Community

Are you connected with any sort of transgender community? How do you feel about your "place" or "role" in the community?
Do you feel part of the GLB community?
How does the way that you think about your identity affect your interactions with these communities?
How do you think your identity is viewed within the transgender community?

Vision

What would your gender be, if you could create it any way you want?
How would that gender be recognized by others?
What would the world be like if everyone's gender were accepted – if there wasn't gender oppression or transphobia?

Education

How do you think transgender issues could be addressed in school settings?

Other – relationships, children, employment, athletic experiences

APPENDIX D

FOCUS GROUP INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

Focus Group- Jan. 27, 2002

Thank you for coming! It is wonderful to have you here! Please read over the following information while you are waiting for the group to get started.

Today's Agenda

9:30am- 10am	Getting Settled
10:00 - 10-15a.m.	Welcome
10:15 – 12 noon	First Session
12 Noon- 1 p.m.	Lunch
1:00 p.m. – 3p.m.	Second Session

Statement of Purpose
As you know, this group is part of the data collection for my dissertation study. In addition to the 23 interviews I conducted over the summer, the focus group serves as another source and a different type of data. Focus group data differs from individual interview data because a group discussion provides direct evidence of the similarities and differences between experiences, without my having to assess those similarities and differences. Further, I can observe *your* perspective on the similarities and differences in the group. People act differently in groups, and provide different kinds of information when interacting with others. Group interaction can bring out the nuances of particular topics, and we may get to areas that would not have come up in individual interviews. Focus groups are also really good for "giving voice" to socially marginalized groups.

I am using the group to go further than the individual interviews. There were certain topics that came up, or were noticeably absent from the interviews, that I am excited to explore here.

The point of my research is to understand the **experiences** of female-bodied people who identify as transgender, who haven't necessarily changed their bodies, and to understand the meaning people make of their identities. That is, how do they **understand** themselves? How do they explain their identity, to themselves and others?

I am here to learn from you. I have particular goals for the sessions, and I have some specific ideas about what I would like to see us discuss. However, I also want to make room for you to pose questions, with the unfortunate knowledge that we most likely will not be able to get to every topic. Finally, while there are topics I am eager to see discussed, I am not invested in a particular outcome of our time together.
What I am interested in:
Your experiences
Your own understanding of self

Articulation of own experience

Morning Session (repeat reminders)
Theme I: **Transgender Identity**
Ideas to try to get addressed: make sure people address what they are, as well as what they are not.

Knowing that I have already gathered data on each of your identities, I want to bypass individual stories and move on to clarifying questions that fill gaps in my research. I am hopeful that as we discuss topics individual identities will be revealed. (Time limits)

Given that most everyone in the room identifies as transgendered, or at least does not, at this point, plan on transitioning…

How is your experience different from someone who identifies as transsexual and who is physically transitioning?
What is it today- that keeps you from calling yourself transsexual and transitioning?

Theme II: **Gender Attribution**
Interaction of other people's perceptions of you and your own sense of your identity.
Ideas to try to get addressed: what do you do to get your trans id seen?

How do you like to be perceived and what do you do to make that happen?
What are the ways you react when you are perceived differently than you wish? (this may be as a man, as a woman, as unknown)

Many people spoke about not wanting to be perceived as a "straight white man", and not wanting to lose the trans part of their id. Many people stated that if they transitioned, they would be perceived as a man, and they didn't want that. They wanted to maintain their trans id. Therefore:
Back up questions

a. Ask them to pose their own
b. Lack of info and role models- what would have made it different?
c. Male privilege- have people noticed this- how does it affect your life, or not? How do you react to it?

Afternoon Session
Theme- sexuality and the body
Ideas to try to get addressed:
Body
While many people discussed top surgery and their desire for it, very few people mentioned bottom surgery- I know one reason is that the available surgeries are not very successful and are expensive- therefore out of reach of most people. I want to know if there are other reasons people didn't mention this.
Is it important, or not important? Is this something that people think about? How do you feel about your body, in terms of this?

If there was an affordable and useable surgery invented tomorrow, is that something you would pursue? How would that change your sense of yourself as a trans person? How would (or, would you?) maintain a trans id, when people would perceive you as male?

Sexuality (is different from sexual orientation)
We're interested in hearing about the interaction of trans id and sexuality. I'm interested in how your gender is portrayed through sexuality, not how sexuality is played out through gender. (not esp. interested in specifics of sex life- more like, what is revealed about your gender through your sexuality- though obviously sex will come up)

How is your gender identity revealed in your sexuality?
How do you think being transgender affects your sense of yourself as a sexual being?

Sexual Expression
What are some challenges (or limitations) about sexuality as a trans person?

Closing
What are some freedoms (or advantages) associated with sexuality (or in general), because of your trans identity?

APPENDIX E

FOCUS GROUP CONSENT FORM

PURPOSE: The purpose of this research is to study the experiences of female-bodied transgender individuals. The data gathered for this research will be analyzed by the primary and sole researcher Linda McCarthy, for the purpose of a qualitative study on female-bodied transgender people.

DESCRIPTION: If you agree to participate in the focus group, you consent to two 2-hour discussion sessions in which you will be asked about your experiences as someone who identifies as transgender. You maintain the right to withdraw from the discussion at any time.
Please read the following statements and respond as to whether or not you are willing to participate:

1. I understand that the use of human subjects in this project has been approved by the University of Massachusetts, Amherst Human Subjects Review Committee.
2. I understand the scope, aim, and purpose of this research project and the procedures to be followed and the expected duration of my participation.
3. I understand that the foreseeable risks or discomforts associated with my participation in this project may include discussion of topics that may be uncomfortable to me personally, a need to further discuss these issues with peers in the ensuing period subsequent to the group, and disclosure of my identity to the other participants.
4. I understand that the potential benefits that may be accrued from this research include participation in a facilitated discussion of issues relevant to me, personal connection with other members of the transgender community, and possible insights into my own and others' experiences.
5. I understand that the confidentiality of all recordings and transcripts from the focus group, or any other records associated with my participation in this research, as well as my identity, will be fully maintained. I agree to being tape-recorded during the focus group discussion and realize that no one other than the researcher, co-facilitator, and group members will know my identity. I understand that the written transcript of the focus group will not be identified with my name, and that a pseudonym will be used to identify me in all written work. I understand that the audio tape of the focus group discussion will be destroyed after it has been transcribed.
6. I understand that although I have the right to review the transcript of the focus group for the purpose of rephrasing or refining my own words, the researcher retains final judgment of what to include in the data.
7. I understand that my consent to participate in this research is entirely voluntary, and that my refusal will involve no prejudice, penalty, or loss of benefits to which I would otherwise be entitled.
8. I understand that if I consent to participate, I may discontinue my participation at any time.
9. I confirm that no coercion of any kind was used in seeking my participation in this research.
10. I understand that if I have any questions pertaining to this research, I have the right to call Linda McCarthy (413-323-9872) or her dissertation chair Dr. Pat Griffin (413-545-0211) in order to discuss my concerns in confidence. If I have questions about my rights as a research participant, I can call the Office of Institutional Research (413-545-0941) to discuss my concerns.
11. I will realize that I will not be provided with any financial incentive for my participation.
12. I understand that a summary of the researcher's interpretation of the data will be provided to me at the conclusion of the study, if I request this information.
13.

I, _____ Consent/Agree to participate in this research.

Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX F

MATRIX DESCRIPTORS

1. Did the participant change their name or not? If yes, was the name distinctly male, or fairly gender-neutral?
2. Which pronouns does this participant prefer?
3. Did the participant identify as a lesbian in the past?
4. What is the participant's current relationship to lesbian identity?
5. Does the participant currently or has the participant in the past identified as butch?
6. How do the people that the participant is attracted to (or dates, or is partnered with) identify?
7. In terms of gender, how is the participant usually perceived?
8. How would the participant ideally like to be perceived?
9. How does the participant feel about his/her body?
10. What is this participant's ideal body?
11. In what ways is the participant currently changing or planning to change his/her body?
12. What, if anything, does this participant do to hide his/her breasts?
13. If this participant desires a different body, for what reasons does s/he not pursue changes?
14. Is the participant interested in or does s/he desire top surgery?
15. Is the participant interested in or does s/he desire bottom surgery?
16. Is the participant interested in or does s/he desire to take hormones?
17. Is the participant considering transitioning? How does s/he feel about transitioning?

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[1] The community American Boyz serves includes (but is not limited to) people who identify as FTM, Butch, Transman, FTV, Gender Outlaw, Transsexual, Drag King, New Man, Boychick, She-Bear, Shapeshifter, Transfag, Tomboy, F2M, Passing Woman, Two-Spirit, Amazon, Tranny Boy, Intersexual, Female Guy, Tranz, Boss Grrl, Bearded Female, Transgenderist, Sir, Kurami, Hermaphrodite, Questioning, Just Curious or a Significant Other, Friend, Family member, or Ally (SOFFA). See http://www.amboyz.org/ for more information.

[2] Bolin describes the pre-operative transsexuals as genetic men.

[3] Leslie Feinberg identifies as s/he, and sometimes uses the pronoun "hir".

[4] Some transgender people spell transsexual with one "s," as a way of reclaiming the term.

[5] Unfortunately early on, I interviewed a few people without a demographics sheet or consent form in hand. This resulted in the loss of data for one interview.

[6] The combination of insufficiently screening participants, and encouraging participants to pursue relevant topics resulted in several interviews in which the participant failed to address any of my proposed topics. I asked one question at the start of the interview, and the participant talked for two hours, until I ended the interview. While such a talkative participant is seemingly ideal, this is true only if one's topics are addressed.

[7] "Transition" is used frequently in the transgender community to indicate moving from one sex and/or gender to another. Denny and Green (1999) define transition as characterized by "profound physical changes and tremendous social stress." Transition begins, they assert, when a transsexual individual "prepares to live full-time in the new gender role," and ends after "genital reconstruction or when the individual senses that the transition has ended" (p. 87). Transition is complete, they state, when the individual has fully integrated into society. This definition is problematic for transgender people, as physical changes are not central to the experience. Most of the participants in this study view gender as a process, thus, "transition" with a clear beginning and ending is an inaccurate way to think about this experience. Nevertheless, discussions about whether or not to transition abound, and while there are many different meanings and implications for this term, most would agree that there are physical, emotional, and social aspects involved.

[8] "Binding" refers to compressing the breasts with an Ace bandage, usually to minimize their visibility.

[9] "T" is used by many of the participants to signify testosterone.
[10] As a possessive pronoun, "hir" is used among some transgender people (Feinberg, 1998a). It is pronounced "here."
[11] In addition to "hir," zi is used is place of he or she. Stevi expressed preference for both these gender-neutral pronouns, and uses them in hir daily life.
[12] The term "top surgery" is one way of referring to double mastectomy. It is typical of FTMs to focus on top surgery, rather than lower surgery (Harrison, 1996)
[13] Marg claimed not to know his race and ethnicity because he is adopted.
[14] Although I do not use the participants' real names, I attempted to capture the essence of their name in the pseudonyms. For example, if someone's name is gender-neutral, I picked a different gender-neutral name.